

Doppelganger: Sequel to Mindbender

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Summary: Hiccup is constantly being haunted by visions of Hadrian. He begins to haunt Hiccup outside of his dreams, and everyone fears for his sanity. Hiccup's the only one who can see him. Who can help? Who'll believe him? He has to find a way to fight him within the realm of his dreams. But Hadrian starts driving Hiccup mad, to the point where he'll do anything to break free from him.

## 1. Prologue

"How did I get here? More important, how do I get out?" Hiccup asked himself, fighting a shudder.

A scratchy gray image, fuzzy around the edges and frayed through the middle came into view. In the distance he could see the outline of a dark forest. A dim violet light radiated through the arrangement of thin black trees.

"\_You're here because I brought you,"\_ he said. \_"So you will know this place."\_

Startled, Hiccup whirled to see him just within the perimeter of the clearing, draped in his armored tunic like before, the shoulder pad spiked with dragon teeth, and the weapons belted to his waist.

\_ "It's a mid-region. A place seldom consciously reached. Once that lies in the space between dream and all realities."\_

Hiccup took a step back, his eyes trained on him. Amid all the phantom trees, he cut an even more menacing figure than he had before. He even seemed taller, if that was possible.

What was worse, he didn't like not knowing if "here" really existed. Being in a dream meant that you were inside your own imagination, right? Then why did this feel so real?

Uncertain of what else to do, Hiccup continued to walk backward slowly, his feet crunching over the brittle ground cover. Hadrian shifted slightly, as though there was something about him creating distance that bothered him. His eyes remained unblinking.

"What do you want?" Hiccup said, his tone stern.

Hadrian scowled. "I want what you have."

Hiccup felt a cold shiver run through his spine. He didn't like it here.

It seemed to be the response he was looking for, though, because Hadrian took a step toward him, then another. His feet made no sound against the patchwork blanket of dead leaves and cinders.

"Though you should know, you have as much to do with this as me."

"Stop right there!" Hiccup ordered.

Hadrian obeyed only as his heel came in contact with a dried twig, snapping it. They both stood frozen then, listening to the echo. The forest seeped whispers. Stifled laughter rang in the distance.

Hiccup felt panic rise within him. He glanced around, searching for a place to run. Every direction looked exactly the same, though, and as far as he could tell, there was no exit.

"You must understand, that your only hope of navigating this realm is to know it for what it is â€“ to know that it is within a dream that you stand." Hadrian said.

"You're making no sense." Hiccup snapped.

"Just figured I'd give you advice on how to live here." Hadrian replied.

"Why?"

"So that you can at least survive, when I take control." He says with a lick of his tongue on his upper lip.

Hiccup's stomach knotted and back flipped three times before sinking to the very bottom.

"Look around you," Hadrian said. "And you will see how your actions have already begun to strip the veil." He held out a hand. Ash floated to light on his fingertips. "It weakens, and the night where it is at its thinnest in your world fast approaches."

"What is it with the way you talk?!" Hiccup asked frustrated.

Hadrian held his hand toward him, palm up. Hiccup hesitated, staring at it as though it were the hand of death. "You need to go. Now."

Hiccup stumbled forward. He grasped his hand tight and pulled him

straight through the line of trees, the sound of his steps absorbed into silence by the powder-soft ash.

They sped through the maze of dead forest, taking sudden twists and quick turns.

You're dreaming, he told himself as they ran. It's just a dream. Any second now you'll wake up, and it will all be over.

A cool breeze filtered through, stirring the curtain of his hair.

From somewhere within the woods, Hiccup heard a rustling sound and then the whisper of his name. His head snapped up. In the distance, a bright light radiant and ethereal, broke like a beacon through the dimness. Long and slender, the light fluttered beneath the cover of a billowing white shroud, taking shape.

Hiccup could not help but steal backward glances as they ran. He saw a figure emerge from within the ebbing light — a woman, angelic in form, though her features remained lost in the distance, buried beneath yards of floating gossamer veils.

Hadrian stopped, yanking Hiccup to face him. "You will surrender, Hiccup. I will break free."

The figure drew closer, and while Hiccup didn't know who it was, it felt safer than being with Hadrian. Hiccup yanked himself free and bolted for the angelic woman.

Hiccup

He ran faster. Behind him he could hear Hadrian on his tale. He didn't look back and he didn't stop. He could hear him following him, but if he looked back now, he'd lose his will.

"You are his only threat and therefore the only hope," she said hastily.

Suddenly, a hand clamped around his mouth. Hiccup muffled a sound as close to a scream as he could manage. Hadrian yanked him back with harsh movements. Hiccup tried to fight him, but he froze when he felt Hadrian's lips by his ear.

"And once you're out of the way, Astrid will be all mine." Hiccup could just hear the grin in his tone. Hiccup wanted to kill him.

Out of this air, Hadrian grasped a doorknob that appeared just as his hand clasped it. It was as though the door had been painted to blend in with the forest. Pulling the door open, it revealed chestnut wood floors and a bedspread with a simple quilt.

Hadrian shoved Hiccup through and he stumbled over the threshold, into his bedroom. There, in his bed, he saw himself — asleep.

"Just you wait, Hiccup." Hadrian called after him.

Behind him, the door slammed shut.

He stood at the farthest edge of the cliffs, boots caked in ash.

Like clawed fingers, the black rocks jutted out over the torpid waters far below, pointing toward the distant horizon. A vast motionless sea, canvas white and still as death, spread itself wide and long before him. It met, in the distance, with the think black line the separated it from a torn violet sky.

At his back stood the skeleton ruins of the forest.

Hadrian closed his eyes, allowing the dead nothingness around him to numb his mind and still the rhythms of his body until all he knew was the buzz of static, that dull vibration, as familiar to him now as breathing. His concentration drew to the cool, soft sensation of the sword in his hand, held tight in his fist.

"Why do you force him to return to this place each night?"

At the sound of her voice, musical and deep, Hadrian opened his eyes, though he did not turn. If he looked, then he would only be trapped again, lured by that ivory seraphim face.

His gaze narrowed on the horizon. He held his silence as the winds stirred. Brushing his hair from his eyes. It flicked cold fingers at the skin of his arms.

"But do not forget that it was he who left you here."

Far below, the frost white seas began to churn. The waves turned choppy until restless waves lapped at the rocky cliffs, as though to test their resolve to stand.

There was a billow of white gossamer to his left as she floated to stand beside him. The gales picked up with yet more speed, whipping her hair wildly about her face.

Below them, the sea's vice rose from a whisper to a roar. Waves crashed, throwing themselves as though in suicide upon the pointed rocks. The wind howled past them, lifting her veils into a violet dance. The sword's surface rippled in the reflection of the gleaming light. Hadrian gripped it tighter.

"Standing here, so alone for so long . . . Do you not grow cold?" he heard her ask.

He stared forward, unblinking, as a knife of blue lightning sliced the sky.

"No," he said.

## 2. Chapter 1

Hiccup hugged his legs as he sat on the stool and stared at the pile of embers in Gobber's forge. Gobber was hammering a sword out on the anvil that was still an orange and yellow blaze, fresh from the fire. Hiccup had been with Gobber for three hours yet made no attempt to even lift a hammer.

He watched as Gobber laid the sword on the fire and pumped down on the fan. Hiccup watched as the embers glow at the brush of air, then slowly deflating back to a soft buttery glow. Gobber would flash Hiccup an occasional glance, but Hiccup didn't seem to notice. His mind was too preoccupied.

Why is he still here? He asks himself, slowly resting his chin on his knees.

His muscles were sore since he'd been sitting in this position for hours. Astrid had been sent with Fishlegs on a Dragon Rescue. Something about a downed dragon in the mountains.

Hiccup had been having these strange, reoccurring dreams. Hadrian involving every one of them. He keeps coming back. He keeps threatening Hiccup.

He's still here.

It had been months since Hiccup had broken free of Alvin's Changewing. Nearly eleven months, and yet he still Won't. Go. Away. But why? At first, he was simply something that Alvin had created in order to obtain control. But if that were the cause, then why was he still around. Shouldn't he have been gone once the Changewing was dead?

The first few months were fine. Then later in the summer, Hiccup had been having strange dreams. He still couldn't see him, but he slightly felt him. Hiccup had assumed it was due to the traumatizing effect Alvin had on him.

But lately, he's been wondering, if Hadrian was really a piece of him. The thought shudders him to the core. And now the dreams have been getting worse. At first, he was just feeling him, and then there was a faded apparition.

And now, he can see him. Feel him.

He was afraid to sleep at night in fear of dreaming of him.

Hiccup wanted to tell somebody. But his Dad had become slightly overprotective ever since the incident with Alvin, and he didn't want to worry his father more. Toothless was an option, but even with their tight friendship, it'd be weird talking to a dragon; even if he did share in the experience.

He thought he could turn to Astrid. They've become more serious over the months after Hiccup's experience. But if she's not willing to be open minded, then whom else was he to turn to?

"Hiccup!" Gobber yells, and Hiccup flinches in his seat.

He looks to find Gobber standing in front of him. The sword now propped on the hooks on the wall, sharp and lethal. Hiccup looks to Gobber, small beads of sweat from the heat materializing on his forehead.

"Are you okay? You've been staring at the fire for awhile." Gobber confirms.

"I've got a lot on my mind." Hiccup says.

He releases his legs from his iron grip, and pins and needles invade his legs. The flow of blood returning to his long numb finger nails. He pushes himself up from the stool, but sways in dizziness as the world flashes suddenly, and Hiccup grips the stool. All his joints complain and Hiccup has to stomp his left foot as it's been asleep for so long.

"Everything okay?" Gobber asks as he wipes clean his axe hand.

"Yeah, I just," Hiccup hesitates. "I just haven't been able to sleep in a while."

Before Gobber could ask any further questions, Hiccup made a quick 'I'll see you later' and strolled out. He walked through the Plaza, feet brisking across the dirt and stone. He didn't know where he was going, but until Astrid came back, there was no one.

Hiccup hated feeling this alone. All he wanted was his life back. To be back to normal and just go to the Academy. As Hiccup's feet carry him to through the village, Hiccup wanders into space. Running on pure nerve, he makes it to the edge of the woods and pushes through.

He vaguely remembers what he did while he was imprisoned by Hadrian. There was dragon's blood everywhere. People feared him. He was a monster. Hiccup clenches his fists and fights back the tears of regret that threaten to trickle down his cheeks despite his solitude.

Suddenly a flash of black moves out of the corner of his eye. Hiccup whirls and finds nothing. His heat pounds in his ears.

Please, not again, he begs.

"Why are you all alone? Your time's running out. You should be with your friends." The voice said.

"Who says you'll even win?" Hiccup protests as he rotates in a circle, trying to identify the shadow being.

"I do, and you do as well. Your smarts say you don't stand a chance." He taunts.

"But my heart says I do." Hiccup retorts.

"Your heart is weak. Deceptive. It'll only grant disappointment." He says. "And once your body belongs to me, I'll have Alvin destroy your home and loved ones."

"I'm not afraid of Alvin." Hiccup says.

"Stupid boy."

Hiccup froze. His voice was real, and it was right next to his ear. Brushing the hairs against his skin. Tickling his ear. His body went rigid as he felt the coldness of a body standing behind him.

The forest is dead quiet. Something Hiccup hadn't noticed until Hadrian was standing right behind him.

"Alvin's not the one you should be afraid of."

Hiccup turns and there he is. Scars adorning his body. Inky locks covering curtaining one eye, an armored dark green tunic on his torso. His multiple weapons hanging on different parts of his body. And the smell of dry blood coating his body.

"And you know that." He smiles

Then there's a sudden flash of blue lightening and Hiccup finds himself standing on a Cliffside. A fierce wind slicing through the frigid air and chilling Hiccup to the bone. Blue lightning flash in the purple skies, like neon fissures slowly moving across the sky until the whole thing comes crashing down and suffocating him in cotton clouds. He shivers as if he'd been caught in the storm with nothing but his tunic.

Again?

"Take a look at this tiny place." Hadrian suddenly says.

Hiccup looks and finds him standing at the very edge of the cliff. Hiccup stares at him. It was strange. He seemed, majestic standing there. The wind caressing his face so, gently.

"What is this place?" Hiccup softly asks.

Even with the sudden and booming cracks of lightning, Hiccup was still afraid that any loud noise will suddenly break him from his tranquil state. Then Hiccup would find himself with a sword in his stomach.

"This world has been connected." Hadrian says.

"What?"

"Tied to the darkness of your mind. And soon, it'll be completely eclipsed." He slowly peers over his shoulder as Hiccup. "Once I take over."

"Is this where you, live?" Hiccup asks, an icy lump in his throat causing his voice to cut off.

"This place is a prison. Surrounded by water." He says, tightening his grip on his sword, as if it'll evaporate if he let's go. "I want to escape from this prison. But I can't. As long as you still live."

"This isn't my fault Hadrian. I didn't create you. Alvin did." Hiccup cautiously says.

Hadrian mockingly snickers. "That buffoon was a liar and a useless excuse for a savage."

Hiccup suddenly finds his feet slowly sliding across the dirt toward Hadrian. His toes drag as he places his foot, bone by bone on the dirt. Stalking toward him. He could push him off, but somehow Hiccup

knew that wouldn't do anything.

"So, wait. This is my dream? We're in \_my \_world?" Hiccup asks, stopping to look around.

"Yes." Hadrian answers.

"Impossible."

"Everyone has a dark side Hiccup. And as long as there's darkness in the heart, it exists." Hadrian explains. "And there is so much to learn in the realm of dreams. And you know so little."

"Well that's because I don't spend free time studying my dreams." Hiccup mocks.

Hadrian snickers again and slowly turns to face Hiccup. Hiccup takes a half step back.

"You don't understand. What you have concealed, you shall become."

"That's a lie. I won't let it happen." Hiccup said as the gales picked up. "I'll find a way."

Hadrian mocks him with a laugh. "Your optimism is quite adorable." He slyly smiles. "But you're forgetting one thing,"

He suddenly steps closer to Hiccup as lighting flashes. The salty sea smell of the ocean infecting his nose.

"This is my world. The one place that you seldom spend your time. And now it belongs to me." he says.

"And just how do you plan on getting through?" Hiccup challenges. "You can only haunt me in my dreams. And not even that will allow me to set you free."

"Maybe not. You're very strong-willed, that I know." Hadrian says, then he suddenly disappears. "But I'm much more impulsive." His voice says by Hiccup's ear. Hiccup jumps back startled.

"Look around you, Hiccup. Look at what I can do in this world. I know this entire place inside and out."

"You've only been here for a few months after you were abandoned by Alvin." Hiccup argues.

"I've been here longer than that." Hadrian retorts.

Hiccup suddenly halts. "How long?" he asks.

"A while." Hadrian draws closer, yet Hiccup stays. "And I will break you. In due time." He suddenly holds Hiccup's chin in his thumb and forefinger. "I'll drive you to insanity." He nearly promises.

Hiccup shudders and pushes him away. His skin tingling from where he touched. "Even if you do, you're still inside my head. Just how do you plan to get out?"

Hadrian smiles. His eyebrows narrow and the evil gleam in his eyes gives Hiccup goosebumps. "Through you."

Suddenly Hadrian charges Hiccup in a blur of speed. Hiccup feels him grip his wrist, and it's soon met by a severe burning/stinging sensation. Like a coal from Gobber's fire had been placed on his skin, accompanied by the gnarling pinching of frost bite.

Hiccup screams and yanks his wrist back. He looks and finds a letter charred into his skin. He can't read what it says as its crimson red glow made it hard to read. Hiccup looks to Hadrian who only smiles.

Then with another flash he's gone and Hiccup blinks, and he finds himself back in the forest.

Hiccup gasps as if he's just submerged from spending hours from underwater. Lying under a young oak, the leaves rustle in the breeze and block and open several small holes, letting in little golden darts of sunlight. Hiccup's breathing heavy, sweat on his forehead.

He flinches when he hears his name called. He looks and finds Astrid.

Her head peeks around from behind some foliage. "Hiccup, there you are. I've been calling you." she says smiling.

Her expression changes in a snap when she sees the look on Hiccup's face. Her lips press into a straight line.

"Hiccup, are you okay? You look like you've seen a ghost." She says.

She walks over and kneels down placing a comforting hand on his shoulder. But Hiccup only flinches as flashes of what happened blind his thoughts.

He blinks multiple times to make sure that what he's seeing is real.

"Hiccup?" Hiccup's head shifts to her. "Did you see anything?" she repeats.

"Not a ghost." He manages to say. He swallows heavy. "I saw Hadrian."

Her expression hardens as he says his name. She comes close and wraps her arm around him in comfort.

"What happened?" she asks in a concerning tone.

"I," Hiccup struggles to find words. "I can't explain it. Nor do I want to."

He suddenly gets up and starts quick walking back to the village.

"Hiccup!" Astrid calls.

"I'll see you later!" he calls back. Then he starts running.

Back at the house, Hiccup just couldn't eat their dinner of fish stew. Toothless had been munching on a basket filled with several fish. Gobber had been invited over and was more than happy to take Hiccup's untouched bowl.

"Are you alright Hiccup?" his Dad asks. "You look a little pale."

Stoick even placed the back of his hand on Hiccup's forehead to check for a fever.

"Um, I'm just, tired." Hiccup said.

He couldn't bring himself to tell his father what had happened. How could he? His father was still guarded after what Alvin had done months before. And this would only set him off. Stoick gets up and takes their bowls and places them in the tub of water by the window.

"Rough day?" Gobber interjects as he gets up and settles by the fire.

"A little."

"Well, why don't you go flying? That always makes you feel better." Stoick suggests.

"Um, not today. It, looks like it's going to rain." Hiccup lies. "I think I'll just head to bed."

"Very well." Stoick says. "Oh and by the way son, you might want to check your arm. It looks like you've got a burn."

Hiccup suddenly freezes when he's mid-way up the steps. He doesn't turn around and ask what, instead, he swallows hard and runs up the rest of the stairs. Toothless looks and follows him without a sound.

Hiccup sits on his bed and breathes, trying to calm his racing heart. He looks down at his wrist. He turns his hand over and he can see himself shaking.

"No please." He begs whatever unseen forces were forcing this upon him.

Toothless suddenly bumps his arm and Hiccup crashes to the floor in a scare.

"Hiccup?" his father calls from downstairs.

"I'm fine dad, Toothless just scared me." Hiccup calls.

Then he hears Gobber mumble something about how a Night Fury can scare anyone.

Hiccup pulls his knees to his chest and chokes back a sob, but lets the tears of fear flow freely.

"Please no." he begs.

Toothless walks around to Hiccup's left and sniffs his wrist.

Toothless snarls. He looks to Hiccup and he wines. Hiccup breathes heavily. He slowly lifts his wrist and he could see it was glowing. Like a soft candle was embedded into his wrist.

As he slowly curls his fingers around the hem of his sleeve, the glow became brighter. Soon pulsating slowly like a beacon. Hiccup squeezed his eyes shut and took a breath. He yanked the sleeve down.

The glow could be seen in little swirls of red white and orange light as Hiccup closed his eyes tighter. But he had to see it. He slowly opened his eyes, blinking so they could focus. When they settled, his body went numb.

The letter was glowing red as he stared, pulsating. He lost all feeling.

Outlining the letter, there was charred skin in the final stage of healing. Bits of blood drizzled in some parts. At first, Hiccup had imagined seeing his veins and bones from how deep the cut had gone, but he only saw the light. And what looked like white and red lava swirling and swaying inside his wrist.

As he touched it, fingers trailing over the skin, it felt real.

The healing skin, the engraving itself, but he couldn't feel the lava. It only felt like his skin.

Toothless' eyes stayed their passionate green as he looked from Hiccup's wrist to Hiccup. Hiccup didn't look him in the eyes. He couldn't think. He didn't know what to think.

It was real?

"No." he said out loud as he clenched his eyes shut and rested his forehead on his knees.

He brought his arms in and hugged himself. He began to sob. Toothless only cooed as Hiccup cried.

Somewhere, whether in his head or just outside his home, laughter was heard.

Cruel and unforgiving laughter.

### 3. Chapter 2

Hiccup stayed awake that night, afraid to go to sleep. He lied awake in his bed, the moonlight gazing down on his bed. Toothless lying on guard, but sleeping soundly. Hiccup pulled down his sleeve to reveal the mark that had long stopped glowing at midnight.

N.

What could it mean?

Hiccup traced his fingers along the letter. The indentation his current concern. What as he to do? What could the letter mean? Hiccup only sighed as he rolled to his side and pulled the cover above his head.

He didn't want to sleep tonight, but he had to. He'd have to face him sooner or later. Hiccup looked up at his headboard, and stared at the shadows adorning the little stuffed Nadder. Hiccup reached up and cradled the dragon in his hand.

He stared at it, angled it to the side, then the other. Then he smiled as he brought the stuffed dragon close to his chest and snuggled down into the quilt. He closed his eyes.

This only night, was the one night Hiccup felt like he slept well. He felt protected.

He was back in the woods, but this time, it was a completely different world. There was sunlight, green leaves covered every inch of the once skeletal remains of the trees. Sunlight polluted every spec, every nook of the land. Green grass tickled Hiccup's bare feet as he walked in a field of wildflowers.

A cool breeze brushed his hair out of his face. Gentle compared to the vengeful gales that thrashed his face that night with Hadrian. Hiccup brushed his bangs out of his face as he looked out. There was the cliff that Hiccup would recognize anywhere. Beautiful blooms of white, yellow, violet, and pink cover every inch of it.

Hiccup dares himself to walk closer and sees imprints of a foot and a flat metal one. Hiccup places his prosthetic leg, and it's a perfect fit. Hiccup backs up and the sound of fluttering wings startles him. He looks and sees a white dove fluttering from the grass on the hill. It hovers in the air for a brief second before flying around a large oak.

Following its trail Hiccup jogs over to the tree and watches as it leads two more down the hill and into a valley. As Hiccup follows, more and more continue to join the flock. Hiccup tries to think of why he would dream of white doves. He remembered something about it in school.

White doves represent purity.

Hiccup couldn't help but laugh since his dreamland had been deeply poisoned by the cruelty that is Hadrian. As he followed the doves, suddenly, he came to an abrupt stop. He came upon an entire flock of them. Thousands of birds just sitting on the grass. They suddenly scatter and a single bird flies over to a weeping willow.

Following it, Hiccup sees natural staves embedded in the sides. Like they were growing out from the side. The veil of vines was parted by several branches. Suddenly Hiccup sees a white outline. The minute the dove landed on her hand, a strange ripple washed over her body and it's like she became real. Physically real. Her hair in two separate Viking-styles braids, her tunic covered by her breastplate and a skirt stopping just below her knees. She peered down at Hiccup.

"Mom?" he whispered.

But then she started walking away.

"Wait!" Hiccup called.

Hiccup ran towards the tree and up the steps. Dandelion seeds scattered from their buds and rode the winds as his feet disturbed their position. Vines substituted as a railing as Hiccup struggled to rush up.

He needed to see her.

Hiccup had just reached the top of the tree when he saw her standing there. She was about to take another step when he called.

"No wait! Please." He begged. And she stopped, but she didn't turn around. "Mother, please help me."

She was quiet for a moment. Still petting the dove. "I will always be there for you my child." She slowly turns. "But help, I'm afraid I cannot give."

"He's back. And he's become more powerful than ever. You have to tell me how to stop him." Hiccup said.

"Nothing can be done. The promise of his birth was absolute." She says in a calm voice, but her face was sadness and concern.

"I don't believe you. There has to be a way." Hiccup says as he walks closer.

The feeling protection felt so well. Under the protection of his mother, and her light, made all his problems deteriorate so he could think clearly.

"I don't want him inside me." Hiccup pleaded. "I don't want him hurting anyone I care about. He threatens to drive me to the point where I might even free him."

His mother dismisses the dove and it flies off into the horizon. She walks closer and places a comforting hand on his shoulder. The softness and gentleness of her gesture was something Hiccup rarely experienced and was close to even forgetting.

Hiccup's eyes cloud with tears and he pushes himself into his mother. He wraps his arms around her torso and buries his face into her stomach. She smelt of vanilla and cinnamon. He sniffles as he feels her stroke his hair in a comforting motion.

"I don't want to help him." he muffles into her tunic. He turns his head, resting his cheek. "I'm . . . afraid of him."

"There, there my child. You will find a way." She coos to him. "You always do."

Hiccup clutches fistfuls of her tunic as he tries to choke back sobs.

"I miss you mom." He cries. "I feel so, alone."

"You forever had the love of your people, Hiccup. Even after knowing what you had become, and what that will bring." She tells. "But you must know, the one person who can stop him, is you."

Hiccup looks up to her she smiles and cups his head, wiping away tears with her thumbs.

"But how can I stop him?" Hiccup asks. "I'm afraid of him. And he controls this entire place."

"In your mind, Hiccup, you can take control." She says.

"But how does he do it so easily?" Hiccup asks.

"You must learn to control within your dreams, Hiccup. Only then will you be able to stop Hadrian." She says.

"Oh great, more riddles." He sarcastically says.

His mother only laughs and kisses his forehead. "You'll find a way, Hiccup. After all you got our smarts from me."

"Not Dad?" Hiccup asks with an amused smile.

"You think the man who's as stubborn as a bull is smart enough to figure out half the things you do?" she asks laughing.

Hiccup laughs as he gives his mother a hug. Then, chills crawl up his spine, Hiccup's palms begin to sweat. Hiccup pushes off his mother and looks around. Hushed whispers echo in the valley. The grass slowly rots into a sickly brown. The weeping willow's vines fall off the branches and fade into ash that gets lost in the breeze.

"You need to go Hiccup." His mother tells.

"I would if I knew how." Hiccup said walking in a circle. Looking for him.

"You need to learn how to control your dreams." His mother's voice began to fade.

"Mom?" he turns and finds his mother, vanishing. "Mom!"

"Find a way Hiccup." And then with a simple blow of a gust, she was gone.

"Mom!"

"What a pity." He said, and Hiccup froze. "So sorry she had to leave so soon."

Hiccup turned and he materialized out of the suddenly fog that crawled in. behind him, the skeletal remains of the forest are in view.

"You're like a disease." Hiccup spit.

"You're making this much more difficult than this needs to be." Hadrian says.

"You're driving me crazy!" Hiccup shouts.

"I know, that's the point." Hadrian snickers. "You're the only one who can see me. If you want to prove to everyone else that I'm real, then set me free."

"Never gonna happen. I'd rather lose my insanity than set you free. Having you spread you virus everywhere." Hiccup argued.

Hadrian only replies with his mocking laughter. "You really are a stupid boy. You clearly don't know the limits and measures I'm willing to go to in order to free myself from this place."

"You sound like Snotlout. Not stopping until you get what you want."

"I'm nothing like that insect. I'm much more impulsive." Hadrian smirks. "But I have to admit Hiccup. All that time dwelling in your mind, and yet I had no idea that you housed such dark secrets."

"What are you talking about?" he asks.

"Things in your mind that not even you knew were there. Secrets. Dark secrets. And it's these things that'll help me break free and reclaim what it rightfully mine."

"My body was never yours. It's nothing but a housing space for you. And I will remove you." Hiccup promises.

"I'm amazed how close-minded you are, Hiccup. You have so much more going for you." Hadrian says.

"What?"

"The way I will break free is through you. You're not just a person, you're my portal."

Then Hadrian zips to Hiccup and grabs his biceps and the familiar torturous burning happens again. Hiccup screams as the pain lasts longer than before; and by the time it was done, Hiccup dropped to the grass of ash.

He pushed himself on his numb arms and finds two more burn marks. On his right arm, and A was burned with the N from before. And on his left, and I was etched into the skin. What could all this mean?

"Today, is the day it begins." Hadrian says. "You knew this had to be coming. It is going to happen." Hadrian grabs Hiccup's arms again, but just holds him there. His lips draw close to Hiccup's ear. Hiccup clenches his eyes shut and grits his teeth. "And no matter what you wish, no matter where you go, no matter how you squirm. There is nothing you can do, to stop it."

Hiccup eyes burst open and he screams before slamming the crown of his head into Hadrian's nose and pushing himself away. Hiccup bolts off running down deeper into the valley and doesn't dare himself to look back.

There's no place to hide. All the trees are dead and there are no caves that Hiccup can see. Maybe he could try and imagine one. Hiccup closed his eyes and just thought, \_Cave, cave, cave!\_ Hiccup opened his eyes and didn't see anything.

But suddenly out of the mist a fist came and plowed into his face. Hiccup bolted back and tumbled through the dirt until he came to a brutal stop by Hadrian's foot. Hiccup felt the air leave his body and he curled into a ball as he tried to wheeze air back into his lungs. Hiccup looked out ahead and saw a small pool of water. Hadrian materialized behind him.

"I won't wait forever, Hiccup." Hadrian declared. "You can't run away from me."

"I can try!" Hiccup yelled.

And suddenly, two heavy pieces of the ground rose up and enclosed on Hadrian. Hiccup watched as the sides stretched across one another, enclosing him in. vines from the ground rose up and stretched and wound around the two boulder-like pieces and Hiccup stared in 'aw' as thorns poked out like the spines on a Nadder's tail.

"How did I . . ." Hiccup whispered to himself, but the question disintegrated in his mouth.

\_Hiccup?\_ Someone called.

Hiccup's head jerked from side to side, looking for its origin. There was only the gray skies and charcoal black clouds.

\_Hiccup?\_ It repeated.

Hiccup turned back as the boulder exploded in a cloud of smoke and dry dirt. Hadrian looked to him in shock. He was slightly breathless. Hiccup had only stared into his eyes as a knife of blue lighting cut into the sky and in a flash, Hiccup was back in bed.

He screamed as he thrusted forward, his face dripping with sweat. He was shaking and his thighs were moist with perspiration. His heart rate scared him as he placed his hand over his chest. He swallowed thickly as he tried to calm down. The quilt trembled as Hiccup's legs struggled to find their range of motion.

Hiccup felt the drops of sweat trickle down his forehead to the ridge of his nose and across his cheek. He closed his eyes as the realization of him being back, safe and sound his room settled in. His hand rested in the nape of his neck. Toothless was gone and Hiccup remembered he scheduled an early appointment with Gobber.

"Hiccup?" someone called and Hiccup startled.

"Astrid?" he called.

"Are you up there?" she asked. "Your dad sent me saying he needs you at the docks in a little while."

"Okay." He replied.

"Are you okay?" she asks and Hiccup could hear her footsteps bounding up the steps.

"No! Don't come in here!" he screams and he hears her tracks halt.

"Why?"

"Because, I'm, not decent." He lied.

"Oh, okay." She replied and her steps deteriorated. "I'll see you back at the deck."

Once Hiccup heard his front door shut, he released a heavy breath. He pushed aside the covers and found the stuffed Nadder kicked to the foot of the bed. He cautiously picked it up and tentatively placed it back in the circle out cut of his headboard.

It didn't take until a breeze cut through the skylight in his roof that Hiccup realized he really wasn't decent. His shirt was off. He looked all around and saw it lying in the middle of the floor between his and Toothless' bed.

Hiccup approached it, but when he picked it up, it burned him. Hiccup dropped it and flinched back clutching his hand. It had steam coming off of it from the burn. And yet it didn't set the wooden floor on fire. Hiccup gazed at his shirt and saw it had holes in the upper bicep.

His heart stopped. He rushed down to the bathroom below and looked into the reflective surface of the metal propped on a wooden board. Hiccup nearly broke down crying when he saw the marks burned into his skin.

"No." Hiccup whispered. He dropped to his knees and began to cry.

He made himself stop after the first few tears. He can't break, not yet. That's what Hadrian wants. And besides, Hiccup needed to meet everyone at the docks. And will not show up with evidence of his weak will.

Hiccup stood up and wipes his eyes and cleared his throat. He wipes his face and decided to just suck it up. He washed his face and his hands and looked again in the mirror. How was he supposed to cover these up? His one tunic was destroyed, and he didn't have another one.

Fine. He'll just have to compromise. He ran back up to his room and pried open his closet. He found the cloak Gobber gave to him last year for Snoggletog. It was summer months so it would look suspicious, but Hiccup needed to do it in order to keep the secret. The only silver lining is that the marks weren't glowing like before.

Hiccup pulls on the cloak and leaves the house. After speed walking down to the docks, Hiccup managed to find his father and Gobber waiting. He snaked his way through the small crowd and tried to avoid getting noticed by his friends.

He managed to walk up to his father, but it was Astrid's call that made him realize he was standing next to him.

"Hiccup! There you are." She says as she strolls up. "Feeling better?"

"I guess." He answers.

"Well, that's an interesting get up." Gobber said.

Stoick turns and Astrid looks at him and Hiccup can feel his cheeks bloom red.

"Are you alright son?" Stoick asks.

"I, I'm fine. I think I'm just coming down with a bug." He said.

"Well, you certainly don't look to good without guest. But then again this could be an improvement." Snotlout suddenly interjects.

"Snotlout . . ." Astrid says in a warning tone.

Snotlout simply rolls his eyes and pays attention to the oncoming boat.

"So who are we waiting for?" Hiccup asks.

"A visitor." His father replies.

"Well, that I know." Hiccup said sarcastically. "But who?"

But just as Hiccup asked, the boat had docked. The moment the first passenger stepped off the ship, Hiccup's heart fluttered. There standing before him was the girl who's beauty was beyond compare. Raven locks of charcoal hair, iris skin, and eyes of emerald green.

Her hair pulled over one shoulder and braided down. The patches on her tunic and the little horn carrier strapped to her waist. When she looked to Hiccup, she smiled. Like a breath of spring. Stoick gave Hiccup a slight shove forward of encouragement.

"Hey Hiccup." Her voice was soft like summer rain.

"Hey Heather."

#### 4. Chapter 3

It was weird seeing Heather again. Especially since it was apparent Hiccup was the only one who found her visit unexpected. Hiccup looked to his father and he only smiled.

He placed his hand on my shoulder. "Why don't you show Heather around the island, Hiccup?" he asks.

Hiccup hesitated and he can see Astrid shift out of the corner of his eye. Hiccup wrapped a fistful of his cloak and closed it even more.

"Um, I think I'll pass." He says and everyone's faces turn to surprise.

"Now, now Hiccup, that's not the way to treat a guest." Gobber says with a nervous laughter.

"Well, she's been here before. She knows her way around." Hiccup argues.

"But it's being hospitable." Stoick says.

"I agree with Hiccup." Astrid says.

"And hey, I'll even take up on the chance." Snotlout suddenly interjected.

"Hiccup," Stoick started.

"Look Dad, I'm sorry. Really I am, but I need to go get Toothless and—" As Hiccup was walking away, Snotlout decided it would be a good idea to step on his cloak.

The button snapped and Hiccup spun in a circle and suddenly he covered his arms. But a second later Hiccup blinked his eyes open, and remembered the marks were gone. So he quickly covered his spazy moment.

"Snotlout!" he said. "Gobber gave me this for Snoggletog last year."

"So what? It's the summer months. Learn your season, and fashion for that matter."

"Aw Hiccup, your tunic." Astrid pointed out, and Hiccup breathed a sigh of relief.

"Is that why you wore that thing?" Stoick asked.

"Uh, yeah. Didn't want to looks raggedy for our guest." Hiccup said.

He swooped the cape around and clipped it back on his shoulders. He heard Heather laugh. "It's okay Hiccup. You don't need to look good for me."

"Easy for you to say. You don't need to try to look good." He replied without thinking.

Hiccup's eyes widened, and he felt this cheeks bloom with heat. He could see everyone's eyes widen in surprise and Astrid's face morphed into a small scowl.

"Okay, guess I could give you the tour." He says and his father smiles. "Even though you've been here before." And he looked to his father.

Heather laughed. "Thank you Hiccup." She says.

She walks up to him and he opens his arm, like the gentlemen do, and he loops her hand through, locking them together.

"Well, why don't you kids go with them?" Stoick says and Astrid scoffs but goes on.

The tour, while unnecessary, it took up time and helped Hiccup forget about his, problem. The teens showed her all around once again and the whole time, Astrid didn't seem to like any of it. She seemed to be holding a glare at Heather the whole time.

But it didn't really make sense, she was the one who helped save her family. This new attitude toward her was unreasonable. Hiccup shook it off as they approached the blacksmith's shop.

"So this is the blacksmith's shop. The place where all weapons and dragon modifications are held. And they can also get a thirty percent discount if you purchase an axe today." Hiccup joked.

Heather laughed as she walked in. "Hasn't really changed since I left." She said.

"Speaking of which, not that we want you to leave," and he could've swore he heard Astrid whisper, 'speak for yourself', "but why'd you come back?" Hiccup asks.

Heather was browsing the weapons, and placed a knife back on its hooks before speaking. "My family's visiting my grandmother." She says.

"I didn't know you had a grandmother, Heather." Fishlegs said.

"I didn't either. Well I did, but where she lived remained anonymous. Until we found out she's been living here on Berk."

"Really? Huh, I didn't know that." Hiccup said as he followed her in.

She traced her soft finger along a spread of Hiccup's old sketches. "None of us did, apparently she's been living here for only a few months. Close to a year actually."

"Where did she move from?" Hiccup asked. He leaned against the anvil, crossing his arms while she completed her full circle.

"Again, not sure. She has a way of flying under the waves. She likes to be mysterious. Probably explains why she didn't come to many family parties." Heather jokes at the end.

They both laugh together and Astrid clenches her fists. As Heather rubbed her hand along the pages, she unknowingly to Hiccup walked closer. Hiccup only smiled as she looked to him and softly smiled.

"So!" Astrid's voice suddenly booms and the two jump. "Why don't we continue on huh?" she asks.

Hiccup and Heather exchanged a glance and Hiccup let her leave first. They went for another fifteen minutes around the village. Hiccup stayed in the back, not knowing why, but just needed to, as Tuffnut, Fishlegs, and Snotlout showed her around.

As he followed, he kept getting the strange feeling of being watched. He would constantly glance back and forth but no one was there. Until he looked ahead at the group and saw it. Hiccup stopped dead in his tracks.

His body went numb. A dark shadow figure was creeping behind Astrid. His shape started as a black shadow, and then slowly his features flowed until his evil grin made Hiccup grit his teeth in hatred.

Hadrian smiled in return. The way he moved, so fluid and graceful; he was horrible and fascinating all at once. Like a scorpion prepared to strike, all angles sharp and menace. Fear pulsed through him, and yet he stood rigid.

"Hello Hiccup." He said. "Nice to see you."

Suddenly, he moved. Hiccup's focus snapped to him as, in a series of quick, jerky motions, he brought an arm around Astrid, extending a black-clawed hand toward her.

His nails, more like charcoal fangs from a deadly venomous snake, gleamed in the daylight. Broad daylight.

"What are you doing here?" Hiccup asked.

"Just paying a friendly visit." Hadrian mocked. "And speaking of friends, I like yours."

He brought a claw to Astrid's face, poking lightly at her ear. Hiccup watched in horror as Astrid swatted at the nonexistent fly.

"Stop it!" Hiccup snapped, and suddenly everyone turned and faced him.

Hadrian drew his hand away, using the same claw to point at him now. "Never pegged you for the jealous type."

"Don't touch her again."

Snotlout made a face, and it was the only thing that reminded Hiccup everyone was still there. He stood up straight and cleared his throat.

"You guys go on ahead!" he called. "I need to get something done, but I'll meet up with you."

"Are you sure?" Fishlegs asks.

"Yeah, I'll see you guys at the Great Hall!" Hiccup says.

Then he turns and runs in the opposite direction. He rushes through the village until he ducks into the nearest alleyway and rushes into an abandoned courtyard behind the buildings. He stops in the middle of the yard and turns in a circle.

The courtyard had been abandoned and was now overthrown by vines and foliage. Trapped between the archway walls, Hiccup looked in the shadows and darkness until he turned at his entry point, and there standing tall, Hadrian.

Hiccup clenched his fists. "What do you want?"

"Only what any messenger wants, Hiccup. For his message to be heard." Hadrian says. "It's time your friends learned the truth. And if you don't tell them, I will." He almost threatens.

"Leave them out of this." Hiccup orders.

"I didn't bring them into this. You did." Hadrian says pointing an assuasive finger at Hiccup. "The day you came into their lives as me. And now, I want it back. Tick tock Hiccup. Time is running out."

Hadrian slowly back sup as he's saying this, and when he's finished, a typhoon of fire explodes out of nowhere. Hiccup stumbles back on his cloak and screams as the wall of fires descends on him. He squeezes his eyes shut and readies for the burns. But nothing happens.

The fire's gone.

It disappeared and not even one scorch mark was left behind. The only thing Hiccup sees when he opens his eyes is Astrid standing in the now empty archway.

"Hiccup!" she squeals in worry. "Are you okay? I heard you scream."

She runs over and helps Hiccup up off the ground. She dusts off his cloak. And moves to face him upfront.

"Are you okay?" she repeats.

"Y-yeah." Hiccup says.

He looks all around and scans his body. Nothing. No burns. No scars.

Fishlegs walks through the alleyway and asks. "Everything okay Hiccup?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I just, got spooked. Stupid birds." He says with a nervous laugh.

Astrid's face contorts to worry. So far she's the only one who knows about Hadrian. Or at least his possible return. She only knows what she witnessed in the woods. And that was just a similar scene.

"Hiccup?" she asks, placing a hand on his shoulder.

Hiccup only abruptly shook it off and sped for the entryway. Breezing past Fishlegs, he burrowed into his cape. He looks to Astrid and Fishlegs, then he looks away, with sudden tears threatening to show. He runs through the alley and nearly crashes into Heather.

He skids to a stop and only glances into her green eyes. They ripple with worry and sudden concern. Hiccup flinches away and runs. But his flee was cut short when he crashed into Gobber thick-muscled body.

Hiccup crashes to the dirt.

"Oh, sorry Hiccup. Didn't see you there." Gobber says as he helps him up.

"I-it's okay." Hiccup says.

He looks and sees everyone else running up behind him. They halt when they see Stoick and Gobber. Like Hiccup, they were expecting a chase.

"Hello sir." Astrid says.

"Hey Dad, what's up?" Hiccup asks as he holds his cloak, making it appear as if he were merely chilly. If it weren't for the warm weather, it would've been believable.

"We came to let Heather know her grandmother is ready for her visit." Stoick says.

"Really? Already?" Heather asks with excitement.

"Well, your parents want you home to freshen up, then we can all go see her." Gobber says.

"What exactly does your grandmother do?" Hiccup asks.

"Uh, she's a witchdoctor." Heather nervously says.

Everyone's eyes widen. Heather nervously rubs her arm.

"Wow. That's really cool!" Fishlegs says. "What does she do?!" he asks in excitement.

"Uh, I'm not sure. Nothing bad, thank Thor. So I don't know." Heather says.

"Wonder if she made any potions or brews." Astrid asks.

"Maybe we can make her turn Snotlout into a toad." Hiccup jokes.

Hiccup laughed, and suddenly, something crept over him.

He looked down and a red reflective glow.

Gobber must've cracked a joke because everyone was suddenly laughing. And their eyes averted from him. Hiccup looked and saw the letters from before creep up his arms. But there was something else.

More letters.

Not his name or even Hadrian's. They were just random markings along his legs. In a style, or even language Hiccup had never seen. It must've been old. Really old, like before the Vikings even sailed here. He quietly gasped and closed his cloak. He slowly backed up as everyone's eyes were off him.

But just as he thought he was clear, Astrid turned and caught him.  
"Hiccup?"

Even when Hiccup turned and faced her, he only closed his cape tighter, and turned.

"Hiccup, wait!" she called after him and no doubt now everyone was looking to him.

But he didn't care. He couldn't let anyone see. But for some reason, when Heather called him, he stopped. His lip quivered and the letters eerily glowed a soft light from within him. He could hear her soft footsteps come up behind him, and Hiccup could suddenly feel himself trembling.

"Are you okay?" she asks.

Hiccup takes the risk and turns to her. "I'm fine." He lied, and his voice proved it. It trembled like his body. "I just need to go. There's something I need to do."

"What's going on Hiccup? Is everything okay?" Astrid spoke that time, and Hiccup could see her coming up from behind Heather.

"I'm fine. I just need to go." He says.

"No." Heather declares and Hiccup steps back, practically frightened. "Something's wrong. What is it?"

Stoick comes up from behind the girls, that familiar concern reflected on his face. "What's going on Hiccup? What aren't you telling us?"

Hiccup closes his cloak. "I, I can't explain it. I just need to leave."

And with that, Hiccup turns and bolts of the decks.

"Wait!" He hears his father calls, but Hiccup doesn't looks back.

He runs through the village and through the Plaza, and the Square until he reaches the lone tower he'd been searching for. He stares at it as it scrapes the sky. The wood was old and taken over my moss and mold.

Hiccup took his time climbing the stairs. He would look out and the view of the village was breathtaking, but he didn't come to be wowed. He finally reached the top and was briefly discouraged when he saw the door and windows boarded up.

But he took the chance, and knocked.

There's an eerie moment of silence, but then the sound of a lock unlatching was heard from behind the door and then it opens ajar. Hiccup cocked his head to the side and he could see a flash of grey and wrinkles. "Goathi?"

The door opens wide, and Hiccup's greeted with a wrinkle smile and faded blue eyes. She looks to him and when her eyes drift to Hiccup's legs, her smile fades and those blue-grey eyes shift to worry.

Hiccup opens his cloak and revels the glowing cryptic. That red glow emanating from the inside. Goathi bends down and reaches out, but Hiccup takes a slight step back. She looks to him, and he lets her.

Strangely her soft bony fingers felt comforting when tracing the letters. When she's done with her, inspection, she looks to him.

"I need your help."

## 5. Chapter 4

Goathi hovered her hands over the now glowing crimson marks. Hiccup's cloak hangs on Goathi's coat rack near the front of the door. Hiccup sits on Goathi's kitchen table while she inspects Hiccup's arms. There was no warmth radiating from the marks, and yet Goathi didn't risk touching it.

She draws in the dirt, and Hiccup can't thank Gobber enough for teaching him the basic of understanding her writing. After the basic, he snuck a few more of his books and possibly became an advance. Even more than Gobber. He watches her staff as she traces words into the wood.

"No!" Hiccup cried once she finished.

She had written that this is beyond her comprehension. She can still help, but they need to seek Stoick and Gobber's help.

"No! I can't." Hiccup said as he curls his legs into his chest. Hugging his knees, resting his chin on them.

Goathi taps his knees and gives him a stern look.

"Don't give me that look. I'm doing this for their own good." Goathi places a hand on her hip, unconvinced. "Look, they're still traumatized enough from what happened with Alvin and Mildew. If they find out about this, they'll just go to the island and blast the whole thing to smithereens. And I don't even think Alvin's doing this."

Goathi looks to Hiccup in curiosity. She writes in the dirt and Hiccup looks down.

Hiccup, you can't do this alone, She writes.

"I can try. You don't understand, I'm the only one who can see him. He haunts me in my dreams and no else can see him!" Hiccup piped. "I watched him touch Astrid, and she didn't even scream or shout!"

Hiccup leans forward in frustration as a mild headache started to form just below his temple. He rubs his temples. He feels Goathi place a hand of comfort on his shoulder. He looks to her and suddenly she's blurred by tears.

Hiccup sniffles and wipes it away with the heel of his hands. The looks on her face says, You need to do this. Hiccup stares at the wooden floor, pondering. Then his thoughts were ruined when the marks

grew brighter. Hiccup's eyes widen and he looks to his hands.

He and Goathi both witness together live as two more mysterious marks shape and form on Hiccup's palms. "No,"

He looks to Goathi, and the look on her face discourages him highly. She stares at it in horror. As if it was the devil itself. Clearly, this was either very evil, or she didn't know what it was and it even scared her. And a sudden knock on her door scares them both, and in an instant, the marks fade away.

From behind the door, Stoick's voice was heard, but Hiccup looked down and saw four small shadow, feet as they blocked the sunlight. "Goathi, is Hiccup with you?"

She turns to Hiccup and he stays frozen, staring at the door. He wasn't ready for this. His eyes flick to Goathi, and he shakes his head. Something about the look on Hiccup's face made Goathi truly see the fear swimming within them. She couldn't tell them if he wasn't ready. Especially for something even she was foreign to.

She goes and snatches Hiccup's cloak. After handing it to him, she motions with her staff, a secret back door that was only fit for someone her size. But Hiccup could make it if he crouched down. And knowing how elders are treated on Berk, no one would even consider asking if they could look through her stuff. That's just disrespectful for an elder.

Hiccup wraps the cloak around him and pulls the hood over his head. Another knock and Goathi urges him on.

"Thank you." Hiccup mouths and Goathi simply brushes her knuckles on his chin.

Hiccup silently opens the door and slips out. He has to crawl most of the way, but when he hears Goathi open the door, he's long gone. He crawls on his hands and knees until he sees daylight streaming in between the cracks in the door.

When he sees an opening he can break through, the shift onto one elbow and kicks at the door with his heel. The wood dents, but doesn't break. A sudden creaking from above makes Hiccup go rigid. Small splinters sprinkle down and Hiccup lowers as he feels them tickle his head.

Flipping his hair, he listens as Stoick asks Goathi what the sound was. Hiccup kicks again and it only dents even more.

"There it is again." Gobber says.

Hiccup takes his chances and by the last kick, the boards shatter and Hiccup crawl out. There was nothing but a simple ledge that barely fit his lean-muscled body. Not knowing how slim it was, Hiccup slips but luckily grabs the ledge just as he watched the shattered remains of the boards fall.

He was still very high up. And his hands could only take so many splinters. "Thanks for the help Goathi." Hiccup mumbles under his breath.

He couldn't make any calls without Stoick and the others finding him. He'll just have to wing it. His fingers started to twitch from bearing his weight. Hiccup wiggles them to stretch them out, and then scoots his way along the ledge.

Once he sees another ledge, after testing its weight hold with his foot, he jumps down. The rest of the trip down was pretty easy as he found stairs leading closer to the ground. But as he finally reached ground, he felt fingers along his arm. He jumps back startled.

"You really think that cranky old bat can help you?" he asks.

Hiccup turns. "If anyone know the history of this island better, it's her." He stated.

Hadrian materializes out of the shadows of the pillars.

He mocks Hiccup with a laugh. "Did you not see the look on her face? Even she didn't know what these are. The fear in her eyes. This is beyond her level of skill, Hiccup."

In a flash he snatched Hiccup's wrist and eye-level, all still glowing a deadly crimson red.

"But you know." Hiccup says jerking his hand away. "What are they?"

"Hmm," he starts. "Tell me Hiccup, how many sleepless nights have you had trying to uncover its secret?"

"Not much." Hiccup snaps. "I'm more concerned about my father and friends."

"Well, looks like they're very concerned about you too." Hadrian's eyes flick over Hiccup's shoulder and when Hiccup turns to look, then back, Hadrian vanishes.

Hiccup looks and sees Astrid, Heather and the others walking towards him, talking. They hadn't noticed him talking to, himself as they would see it. Hiccup pulls his cloak shut and braces for the confrontation by Heather and Astrid.

"Hiccup, there you are." Astrid says when she spots him. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine, just needed to see Goathi about something." Hiccup keeps his head bowed and urges forward, hoping they get the message of him saying he can't stay.

"Everything okay?" Heather asks.

"Yeah, everything's fine." Hiccup says as he brushes past them.

"Wait, where are you going?" Astrid asks.

"To get Toothless." Hiccup stated.

"What's a matter Hiccup? More imaginary friends you need to see?" Snotlout mocks with a laugh.

Hiccup stops dead in his tracks. There was an ugly, twisty feeling in his stomach as Astrid snapped at Snotlout. Tears stung Hiccup's eyes as he wraps his fists in his cloak, trying to ignore the way his stomach burns. The splinters embed themselves deeper into his palm, but the pain helps him stop the tears. He can feel a sob choke him, just by his Adams apple.

Suddenly, Hiccup feels someone reach out and unravel his cloak from his left hand. The skin was soft, warm. The smell of something feminine comforting him. He turns and finds Heather. Her hands cupping Hiccup's. For a moment, he wants to burrow in. soak up the comfort she offers and pretend she can make it better.

He turns away not wanting her to see the oncoming tears.

"Look Hiccup," she begins.

"I'll see you around." He cuts her off.

But as he was about to take a step, his father's voice echoes.  
"Hiccup!"

Hiccup freezes in place he turns to see Gobber and his father walk down the steps of Goathi's home. "Dad, uh," he takes a step back.

"Hiccup, what's going on?" his father asks. "Why were you here to see Goathi?"

"Look, Dad I'm fine, I just felt a little, sick." Hiccup lies.

He tries to back up, and as he turns, Snotlout suddenly yells. "Where do you think you're going?!"

He snatches the back of Hiccup's cloak and yanks back. While he only meant to stop Hiccup, the cloak ripped along with the back of Hiccup's tunic. The fabric of the shirt easily able to tear with the holes already in it.

"Snotlout no!" Hiccup cries as the fabric is pulled and ripped with a painful shredding sound.

Hiccup collapsed to the dirt and he cringed as he heard everyone gasp behind him. He could feel the heat radiating from what he knew to be more cryptic markings on his back. small ones practically scraping down his spine, then possible some big ones in his shoulder blade area. Hiccup swallowed hard as he forced himself to turn. He bit the inside of his lip hard.

The look on everyone's faced matched one another. Shock. Fear. Horror. Hiccup could see the torn remains of his cloak and part of his tunic off to the side. His father slowly and rather cautiously walked forward as Hiccup pushed himself to his feet. His arms felt numb from the fear and he wanted to disappear.

"Hiccup," his father whispered.

Hiccup pushed himself to his feet, and he crosses his arms over his chest. His knees bent in and Hiccup felt a rebel tears fall down his

face. He sniffled.

"Hiccup," Astrid said, but suddenly she was cut short by a maniacal laughter.

Hiccup looked all around and felt an unworldly panic pool into his stomach. He looked and saw everyone else turning and looking. Hiccup thought it was just because they thought he heard something. But something seemed different. It felt more realistic.

"Do you hear that?" Hiccup mumbles.

Astrid turns to him and she faintly nods her head. Hiccup's surprise and happiness collided with shock. Maybe now they'll know why he was acting so strange.

"Well, well, look at this." He said. "You gathered everyone together, just to see me."

Hiccup rotates in a circle as Hadrian's voice echoed throughout the Plaza.

"How sweet." His said.

Hiccup jumped as Hadrian materialized straight behind him. Hiccup nearly tumbled in the dirt, but managed to catch himself. Hadrian walked forward and in turn, Hiccup stepped back.

"How are you still here?" Stoick asks. His anger growing as he curled his hands into fists.

"Wait, you can see him?" Hiccup asks pointing to Hadrian. Everyone nods. "H-how is that possible? I was the only one who could-"

Hiccup's sentence fades in his mouth as he turns to Hadrian. He steps closer. "Let's just say I had a bit of a power surge and now, I'm ready to make my presence known to all."

"What are you doing here Hadrian?" Astrid asks through her grit teeth.

Hadrian's eyes gaze to Astrid. "Surprised to see me?" he asks.

"I'm surprised to see you still alive." She answers.

"Well, it's so nice to see you." Hadrian says licking the corner of his mouth.

"Go suck a rock!" Astrid snapped.

"Whoa, attitude. I like that." Hadrian mocks. Astrid snarls in answer.

"What do you want, Hadrian." Stoick repeats, his anger bursting at the seams.

"What any imaginary friend wants, Stoick. To be real. And with the help of your son, I'm going to get there." Hadrian says, then his eyes flick to Heather, and Hiccup's heart sinks. "Well, well,

well."

Hadrian says as he walks toward a thin pole. Everyone's left in astonishment as he disappears into it when walking behind it. Like a shadow, and in the blink of an eye, he was behind Heather. She jumps back.

"Who do we have here?" he asks as he hovers toward Heather. The predatory look in his eyes made Hiccup's stomach shrink. "What's your name beautiful?"

As if entranced, Heather replies. "H-Heather."

"Well, Astrid looks like you've got some competition." He laughs. Astrid grits her teeth, and Hadrian looks to Heather and back to her, "No, not really. She's way prettier."

"Excuse me if I don't seem appreciative of your compliment." Heather snaps.

"That's okay." Hadrian snaps, then suddenly, he has Heather's chin in his pointer finger and thumb. "You can show me your gratitude later."

"Hadrian!" Stoick yells and Hadrian turns to him, releasing Heather's chin. "Why are you targeting my son?!"

"You should've been long gone after Alvin's Changewing was dead." Gobber interjects.

"Oh that. Well, turns out I wasn't sent to kingdom-come once that dragon died. Instead, I was given refuge inside Hiccup's mind. I immediately began plotting my revenge, but I was so weak." Hadrian placed the back of his wrist against his temple, in a 'whoa-is-me' gesture. "And so I spent the last few months regaining my strength until, Ta-da! Here I am. And thanks to your son, I'll be free in no time, and then Berk will once again be mine."

"Now while we're here!" Gobber stated, pushing Hiccup behind him with a simple swoop of his arm.

Hadrian only laughed. "There's nothing you can do to save him now."

Hadrian's eyes glowed an ominous red, and suddenly Hiccup screeched from behind Gobber. He was holding his head, suffocating his hair.

"He's all mine." Hadrian snapped.

Hiccup turned to face the sky, and unleashed an unbridled scream. Red beams tore from his eyes, shining like beacons in the sky. The remains of Hiccup's tunic deteriorated and more of the cryptic marks embedded themselves on Hiccup's skin. The pain of the marks made Hiccup feel like he went jumping into a lava river, set dead in the middle a piercing snowstorm.

Hiccup's pants were ripping and degrading away as everyone watched helplessly. And all Hadrian was doing was holding out his hand. His howls of anguish grew louder accompanied by the sound of shredding

fabric, and possible skin. Everyone's heartbeat tripled in speed, and its rawness spreading sick dread through them, pouring like scalding liquid through their veins.

Hiccup closed his eyes, severing eh light of the red beacons. Even when he stopped for a slip second for a breath, it was replaced by another scream. The shrill sound of it ratcheted up everyone's spine and, reaching through Stoick like a clawed hand, seizing his heart with a clutching grip.

"Stop it! You're killing him!" Stoick begged.

Hadrian's sly smile shriveled his heart, but finally, he lowered his hand, eyes returned to those two jade holes in the spheres, their gaze so sharp it could cut. Hiccup dropped to his knees, burned with Hadrian's cryptic threats embedded on his skin. His breathing severely heavy, as if he'd surfaced from water after running all around the mountains nonstop.

Hiccup looked at his hands, his arms, then slowly lifting to face Hadrian. Everyone followed his gaze.

Hadrian smiled. "We'll be in touch." Then he simply faded away right before their eyes.

In the eerie silence that followed, something could be heard. Crying. Ripping through the silence. Stoick turned to Hiccup, hunched over, hugging his middle, rocking back and forth. He hustled over to his son and cradled him in his arms. Hiccup wouldn't stop. Stoick lifted him up and Gobber followed him home, accompanied by Heather â€“ still in a state of shock, and the rest of the Vikings.

Stoick gave the marks one last glance before the faded into Hiccup's skin.

Later in the evening, Hiccup sat at the table, surrounded by friends and Toothless, clasping a mug of warm herbal tea Heather made. He held it between his wrists, even after the heat form was leached into the air of his home.

"After I was released from Alvin's control, Hadrian didn't completely disappear. Instead, he receded into the depths of my mind." Hiccup explained.

"But how was that possible, wasn't he merely something that Alvin created from when you had amnesia?" Gobber asked as he placed a bowl of stew in front of Hiccup.

"I'm starting to think that Alvin didn't create him at all." Hiccup stated.

"What do you mean?" Astrid asks.

"In order for Alvin to control me, he needed something that would reflect how he wanted me to act. So, I think that Alvin pried a piece of my personality in order for that to happen."

"So, what are you saying?" Fishlegs asks, fear in his eyes.

"Hadrian isn't some illusion that'll go away. He's a part of me, he

is me." Hiccup said, and everyone's eyes widened.

"So, he was a different part of your personality, and after Alvin was defeated, he just went back to the recesses of your mind?" Gobber put it in laments terms.

"But developed his own personality." Hiccup clarified.

"What emotion could it have been?" Fishlegs asked.

"A mixture most likely." Hiccup said. "Anger, hatred, bitterness. Evil."

On cue, Hiccup's hand glowed red and two symbols wrote themselves in his palms.

"Okay," Astrid said, "how to we stop him?"

"I don't know if we can." Hiccup denied, curling them into fists.

"That doesn't mean we still can't try." Fishlegs said.

Hiccup turns to look to Heather who's rubbing her arm.  
"Heather?"

She looks to him and she gets up from her seat. She walks around until she faces Hiccup, staring at the symbols.

"I think I know someone who can help." She said with a shy smile.

Hiccup returns it. "Then we'd better catch you up."

## 6. Chapter 5

When Heather said her grandmother lived in seclusion of the village, she really wasn't kidding. If people thought Mildew's place was far outside of town, Heather's grandmother has them beat.

Everyone ended up needing to take their dragons as they flew their way past an endless vast of trees and valleys until they reached a swamp located at the very back of the island.

Once arrived, according to Heather, there was a small and highly secluded cottage located at the very back of the swamp. Most likely so no one would bother her. Apparently she forgot about family visitations. The cottage had a molded wooden walkway leading up to the house. And the cottage was built on a tract of wet, spongy land.

"So why is your grandmother so far outside of town?" Hiccup asks Heather, as she had been assigned to ride with him. Her mother riding with Stoick and her father with Gobber.

They brought along Goathi as well, riding with Astrid, since they were hoping they could compare notes and help find an answer for Hiccup.

"I guess it's a habit." She answers brushing a strand of her hair out of her face.

"A habit?" Hiccup repeats.

"Yes. People don't like how spiritual she is, and she was often shunned around our previous home." Heather explains.

A sudden sound of an animal scares her, and her reflexes end up having her wrapping her arms around Hiccup's torso. Her hand accidentally resting over his heart. But Hiccup didn't seem to notice, too intrigued about Heather's grandmother.

"I'm so sorry." Hiccup says. "I hope she knows we'd never do that to her."

"I'm hoping I can convince her to move more into the village." Heather says.

"Well when she sees, me, she will." Hiccup says, looking down at his arms, but the marks had long gone vanished.

"This is where her voodoo magic comes in handy." Heather says with a shy smile.

Hiccup smiles back as Heather relaxes into his back. The dragons were walking along the side of the muddy and algae trail, when Toothless' foot suddenly sinks into the mud. Toothless squeals and tugs at his foot. Hiccup dismounts, landing in a good gathering of mud himself. Once he frees his foot, he checks on Toothless.

Thornado stops and everyone turns back. "Everything alright Hiccup?" Stoick calls.

"Uh, I don't think so." Hiccup answers. "Toothless is stuck."

Stoick dismounts and aids Toothless in freeing his foot. Once free Toothless shakes his foot, splattering specks of blood everywhere.

"Can someone remind me again what we're doing here?" Fishlegs asks as Meatlug lugs over.

"We're here to find an answer for Hiccup." Astrid says sternly. "And to free him from Hadrian."

"And if Goathi doesn't know what to do, then we'll find someone who can." Stoick stated. "Starting with her."

As they continue on, the afternoon grew into evening, and everyone began to get on edge as the plants and vegetation kept getting mistaken for animals of hands. Heather kept looking around the swamp for any signs of her the cottage.

Soon Hiccup tapped her knee and said, "Looks like we're on the right track."

He points to a sign that said in sloppy red paint, 'Beware of the Witch'. Soon after it, there was an old wane tree with a human skull on the top, and two branches poking out on either side stating from

left to right, 'Go' on one, and 'Back' on the other.

Fishlegs' cries and whimpers could be heard as they pushed aside more tall grass and came to a final sign, guarded by an alligator hissing in warning.

"Enter at your own risk." Heather read out loud.

"Think we found it." Hiccup commented as they pushed through the thick and moist vegetation.

"Risk." Fishlegs repeats. "This is just perfect." He mumbles.

Once the cottage was in sight, everyone dismounted from their dragons. Hiccup stared at the cottage, intimidated.

There was a small dock for a single boat, and on every post bordering the cottage, skulls rested on top of each post. Wilted tree branches extended out and bent in ways that they mimicked starved prisoners, chained to the land.

There was a small river of the swamp cutting through the grass and mud, and severing them from the cottage.

"Great, how are we supposed to get across?" Snotlout snaps.

Hiccup looks around and finds an abandoned canoe off to the side. The oars were covered in algae and Hiccup could've sworn he saw an army of spiders scurry under the seats.

"Well, it's all we got." Hiccup states.

Hiccup ignored everyone's complaints as he, Heather, and Astrid were the first to ride across. Then the twins and Snotlout, and last Gobber, his father and Fishlegs. Heather and her family were pushed forward and led the way up to the cottage.

As they're walking, Hiccup feels a brush by his ear, "Run all you like." It said. Hiccup spun around, stunned. He looked left and right and finally saw him standing, or rather leaning on a rotted weeping willow. "Because no matter where you go, every step brings you close to me."

"Leave me alone!" Hiccup growled.

Everyone turns, but they only see the tree. It didn't matter to Hiccup, he watched Hadrian vanish as their eyes scanned over the spot.

"Come on, son." Stoick ushers on.

The door was left ajar, but no one was home.

"Oh no, no one's here. Let's go." Fishlegs said about to make a break for it, but Astrid stopped him in his tracks.

"Actually, it looks like no one's been living here in ages." Hiccup adds, entering one foot, then the other.

The entire cottage was covered in head to toe of blankets of cobwebs.

Over on one side there was a table draped with a violet tapestry, two candles and a skull as a centerpiece. A long throne-like chair was pushed out, and a skull was chiseled into the top.

"Should we be concerned over the obvious obsession your grandmother has for skulls?" Hiccup asks. Heather shrugs her shoulders in reply.

Deeper in, past a window with shredded curtains, there was a deer posted on a plaque and blanketed by more webs. Its eyes were wide open, as if it were showing you its last expression before death. And a shudder rolled down Hiccup's spine when he saw a small spider crawl out from inside its ear, and into its mouth.

In the very back there was a podium with a large black book propped open. A buttery candlelight gleamed off the gold-lined pages, and a long crimson red page-holder with a forked end, much like a snake's tongue, dug into the center of the two pages.

As Hiccup was about to read it, his name got called. He looks up and sees Astrid standing in front of a large mirror, but she wasn't focused on that. Hiccup walked up and saw dolls lined up in a straight line. All looked just like his friends, yet he didn't see one of himself or Heather.

"What are those?" Tuffnut asked. "They look spooky."

"Voodoo Dolls." Hiccup answered before he could stop himself. "I've seen them before."

"They look just like us." Fishlegs says as he inches closer.

Hiccup stared in shock at the dolls. Each one had pins stabbed into different places. Eyes, hips, legs, neck.

"Don't be scared anyone." Gobber said. "I've dealt with Voodoo before, and it's just a bunch of yank pies."

"That's because you don't believe." Hiccup heard Heather mumble under her breath.

Snotlout took Fishlegs' doll and pulled a pin out from Astrid's. "Hmmm, I wonder."

He looked to Fishlegs with a sly smile. He then laughed and stabbed the needle into the butt of Fishlegs' doll.

"Yeow! I've been voodooed!" he howls.

"Calm down Fishlegs." Hiccup said. "All you did was back into this fork."

Snotlout's laughing hysterically as Hiccup returns to browse the cabin, making his way back to the book on the podium. There was a tiny fireplace in the room, simply studded with small cobblestone. Hiccup doubted if the fireplace was operational, though, because in the space where any fire might have gone, there were instead several small glass vials, each a different color and shape. They stood together like potion bottles in a sorcerer's forgotten cabinet.

"Hey look at these." Astrid and Fishlegs went to go join him in observation. "Would you look at all these things?" he says as he carefully picks up a can with a screw lid.

"Creepy." Astrid says.

"No kidding. Check this out." Hiccup shows her the label of the jar. "Ear of a Newt?"

"Hey Hiccup, what's this?" Fishlegs says as he shows Hiccup another vial. This one was square with a cork stuck in the hole.

"That? Oh that's, 'Canned Hyena Laugh." Hiccup reads.

Fishlegs pops the cork and shake the vial. Suddenly, a creepy and hysterical laugh echoed from the jar. It sounded as if the person, or thing, laughing was delusional. Fishlegs popped the cork back in, and the laughing ceased. He opened it again and shook it, it laughed, and he popped the cork closed again.

Hiccup smiled and shook his head as he went back to the book. Heather was already there and she stepped aside to let him join. "Huh, 'Witchcraft Made Easy'." Hiccup read.

"Funny." Heather said as they flipped through the pages.

As she was flipping through, Fishlegs walks by the mirror, he suddenly feels a bony hand on his shoulder. He assumes it's Goathi, but she's still at the front door with Gobber and Stoick. Fishlegs freezes.

"Uh, Hiccup," he stutters, Hiccup and Heather turn to see the hand. Fishlegs is petrified with fear. "Who do we know that has long skinny hands?"

"Good evening." An elder woman's voice said.

Fishlegs screams and bolts hiding behind Hiccup. The woman was short, a little taller than Goathi, and she had on a worn brown dress with a purple scarf, and her snow white hair was partially in a bun. She had on fur boots with long socks that stop just below the knee, and in one hand a long staff, chiseled with different scrolling designs.

"Uh, your Heather's grandmother I presume?" he asks, trying to be the upmost gentleman.

"Yes, I was just tending to the dogs and didn't hear you knock." She says. Her voice was raspy, and it had a weird tone to it.

Heather steps closer as her parents went to greet the old woman. Hugs were exchanged and the classic saying of 'I haven't seen you in forever'. Once Heather's parents introduced her to her grandmother, her grandmother cupped her face and kissed her forehead multiple times. She clearly missed a generous dose of Heather's childhood, but it's obvious she cares about her so much.

"It's so great to see you grandma." She says.

"So, who are your friends?" she asks as she strolls along to a small

table with a boiling pot filled with water, steam streaming from it. But the strangest thing was that there was no fire making it happen.

"Uh well, this is Stoick, he is the chief of the village of Berk." Heather starts.

"Honored to meet you sir." She says as she holds his hand and curtsies in front of him.

"And this is his friend Gobber. The blacksmith of the village." She goes on.

"And certified weapon maker and combat teacher." He adds.

"This is Snotlout, the twins, Fishlegs and Astrid."

"Charmed. You all can call me grandmamma." Her grandmother says, still stirring the pot of water. "And who are you young man?" she asks gesturing to Hiccup.

Hiccup gulps. "Um, I . . ."

"This is Hiccup, grandma. Son of the Chief." Heather steps in.

"Oh, nice to meet you." she says shaking hands with Hiccup. "Is he your boyfriend?" she asks.

Hiccup and Heather go rigid and Astrid curls her hands into fists.

She pokes Heather in the side with her elbow. "Nice choice honey, you have good taste." She adds a cackle laugh after.

"Oh, no grandma, we're just friends. We actually came here for your help." Heather stutters.

"Hmph. Too bad, he looks like a keeper." She says as she pokes Heather with the wooden spoon. Hiccup and Heather blush in unison as she swirls the foggy water.

"Anyway, we were wondering if you could help us or not." Astrid stated with a hint of attitude.

"Depends on what you're looking for, dearie." She says.

"But before we get to that, what's that smell?" Snotlout interrupts then snatching an extra spoon off the table.

He rudely scoops into the stew and gulps it down.

"Snotlout we're not here to have dinner." Hiccup says.

"Well, too bad, cause this is good." He says readying for another scoop.

But then everyone sees her scoop out some clothes, and personals. "You'll pardon me doing the wash, sweetie."

As Snotlout hacks and wipes his tongue everyone busts out laughing

and holding their middles to dull small knots from laughing so hard.

"So, anyway grandma," Heather starts after wiping away a tear. "We were wondering if you could help Hiccup."

"What's the problem?" she asks after setting the spoon on the table and wiping her hands on a towel.

Heather turns to Hiccup to let him take over. "Uh, well, you see . . ."

But Hiccup's words were cut short once the cryptic markings ran up his legs, stomach and arms, glowing red from within his body. The candles suddenly blew out by an unknown wind. Hiccup gasped, and by reflex, covered his chest and stepped back.

Heather's grandmother's reaction made him feel worse.

Her eyes widened and she covered her mouth in horror after gasping. Hiccup squeezed his eyes shut; he tried to fight back tears for yet again being judged. He heard the steps of her grandmother come closer, and he buried deeper into himself.

The feeling of cold fingertips made him flinch back. He opens his eyes to see grandmamma hovering over the markings, just like Goathi. "Oh, oh dear. You've got some bad juju there boy."

Hiccup swallows thickly. "W-what do you mean?" he stutters.

"Is there any way we can help him?" Stoick suddenly asks.

"I'm, unsure." She starts. "I haven't seen anything like this in ages." She says.

The marks suddenly vanish, as if shaken in fear and the cabin goes back to buttery glow of the candles.

"At least you know what it is." Astrid says.

"Yes, but it isn't good. Follow me." Grandmamma heads down a short hallway, to an old door with a large door pull hand forged.

Hiccup followed steady behind her, along with everyone else. Grandmamma pulled open the door and a long stairwell went down into endless darkness. She brushes past Hiccup, and gestures on. It took them down below the assumed basement everyone assumed it led to. Instead, it led them to an abandoned library, or whatever could be smaller than that, since the first thing everyone saw were books.

Inside, the musty air held an antique thickness, and the scent of dust and aging books combined to make breathing a chore. The front room stretched before him long and narrow, lined with rows of tall, sturdy bookshelves that reached almost the ceiling. Overhead, the tired light of torches burned a dull gold, adding little relief to the accumulated shadows.

Hiccup inched in as he followed Grandmamma. He could barely see anyone anywhere, but then again, he couldn't see much of anything in

general. Carefully he stepped around a mound of ancient looking tomes gathered near the door. He moved between two shelves and thought about calling out but for some reason, couldn't bring himself to break the dead silence.

His gaze passed up and over the marked spines of countless books, every item categorized by its own number and date, and it made him feel almost as though he were walking through catacombs. When they reached the end, he peered around the shelf to see a counter. Well, really, he saw a lot of books piled on top of something that at one time must have been a counter.

Grandmamma walked over and pulled out an older podium, disturbing the cobwebs chaining it to the wall. She blew on it and clouds of dust billowed up, then drifting until they faded into the shadows. Hiccup stepped closer, but as he neared the books, his body glowed once more. An estranged symbol on his forehead, which no one saw earlier, materialized and in an instant, the book's cover mirrored it.

"What is that?" Hiccup asks.

"An ancient book that was once used by and Ancient Order. They weren't exactly Vikings, but they settled in this land ages ago." Grandmamma explained. "Their magic is very powerful, when in the right hands, but shall it fall to the forces of evil, it can be truly devastating."

"But how would Hadrian get a hold of this stuff?" Fishlegs asks.

"I'm not sure. Surely you, Hiccup must've learned something related to it in the slightest." Grandmamma gestures.

Hiccup ponders over this thought for a moment when it hits him. "I remember learning a section about it in school. I didn't think that Hadrian would be able to use it."

"Who is this Hadrian, you speak of?" Grandmamma asks.

"He's an evil being living inside my head." Hiccup says. "He started out as a simple paw when I lost my memory, but even when I had defeated the dragon controlling me, he somehow didn't go away."

"Developed his own being, I see." Grandmamma states. "This could be what we call, a Doppelganger."

"A Doppel-what?" Tuffnut asks.

"A Doppelganger. A ghostly double or counterpart of a living being." Grandmamma explains.

"A ghostly duplicate. Scary." Fishlegs says with a shudder.

"And now he's practically torturing me to set him free. But I can't let that happen. I don't even know how he managed to do this to me!" Hiccup cried as he showed her his arms.

"Doppelgangers often are perceived as a sinister form of bilocation; and are regarded by some to be harbingers of bad luck." Grandmamma

explains while opening the book. "In some traditions, a doppelganger seen by a person's friends or relatives portends illness or danger, while seeing one's own doppelganger is said to be an omen of death."

Hiccup, Astrid and Fishlegs gulp in unison.

"It is also believed that this "spirit double" can have the same memories and feelings as the person to whom the counterpart belongs. It also precedes a living person and is seen performing their actions in advance."

"In advance?" Astrid questions.

"Yeah, like when Hiccup could deafly wield a sword and a crossbow. All of which we know is not true with the normal Hiccup." Snotlout says.

Hiccup gives him a glare and he only shrugs his shoulders. "So what would happen if I released him?" Hiccup questions.

"Well, this boy sounds dangerous, I wouldn't recommend freeing him. Seeing as how it might only worsen the situation. And there's no telling where you might end up and -"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Wait." Hiccup interrupts, what do you mean where I might end up?"

"You see, Hiccup, this boy wants to be real, but in order to do that, he either needs a host body, or become his own being. His own body and mind." Grandmamma says. "If you end up freeing him, there's the small possibility that he could completely phase out and sever your connection. Or, he could wind up stealing your body, suspending you to the realm of no return."

Hiccup swallows thickly. "So, if I free him, and he takes over my body . . ." Hiccup couldn't bring himself to finish his sentence.

"There will no place left for you, Hiccup. If his spirit is free, yours will die."

## 7. Chapter 6

Hiccup stared out at the muggy swamp as he fiddled with his fingers. After the news of his possible death if he were to free Hadrian, his mind reacted before his body. He remembers bolting out of the underground library, through the front door, and his father finding him huddled under a huckleberry bush.

They brought him back and settled him down. But they words of kindness never breached. They were only muted by Hiccup thundering thoughts to never let Hadrian out. To never even let him come close to thinking he's free. He'd rather lose his sanity than his family.

Hiccup now stands out on Grandmamma's balcony, staring out at the swamp, alone. His keeps fiddling with his fingers, debating on how he should approach this. Crickets' music echoed through the night along

with the comforting pale green glow of fireflies. His left hand soon glowed and he clenched his fist tight until the light was sealed in his hand.

"Go. Away." He growls, and after a soft laugh from the swamp, it went quiet.

But it was too quiet. Even the crickets had stopped. The hissing of an alligator was heard, and Hiccup cringed as he heard the cry of a bird cry out. There was the sound of splashing water, the hissing, the flapping of desperate wings and the cries. Then quiet. The crickets resumed, and Hiccup can't help but feel he'd just heard what his own fight with Hadrian will be like.

And how it could possibly end.

Hiccup opens his palm and sees nothing but the remains of his nails digging into his palm. Red crescents curve around the heel of his hand. He startles when he feels a hand on his shoulder. He turns to find Astrid.

"Um, Heather's grandmother found something, and I think you'll like it." She says with a soft smile.

She extends a hand to Hiccup. He takes it, and she leads him inside back down to the cellar which was brighter with the addition of a few more fresh torches. He comes down to find more books, but no they're piled in massive stacks surrounding a small circle at the back of the library. He follows Astrid to find his father, Heather, and everyone else looking through different books.

"What's going on?" Hiccup asks.

"We're trying to find a spell that could possibly help you with Hadrian." Fishlegs says as he rolls back up a scroll.

"A spell?" Hiccup questions.

"Yes." He hears Grandmamma say. "Those markings on your body, those are the cryptic signs for the Doppelganger. They especially made for someone who wants to create another being."

"So, Hadrian marked me with a spell, instead of a curse?" Hiccup asked with a hopeful tone.

"Well, for you, it's more like both." She said. "The markings were originally created to suspend evil spirits from one's body. Much like an exorcism."

"Oh well, that's comforting." Hiccup replies as he walks over to a chair.

Suddenly his head began to hurt, and he braced it between his hands. Suddenly, it was like a flashback to the arena, where Hiccup's eyes glowed that eerie blue, the world shuddered, and his hair levitated and swayed.

Suddenly, three circles appeared on Hiccup's forehead. Inside, strange cryptic, but they matched the ones all over his body. Hiccup's eyes returned to normal and the marks vanished, but the one

on his forehead.

"But for your case, we're going to have to find a way to eliminate him from the inside." Grandmamma said.

"What is that?" Fishlegs asked.

"It just looks like three circles." Gobber said.

"Oh this is bad." Grandmamma stated. "Three marks is the making of the trinity. And so this makes it demonic in nature."

"Demonic? As in demon?" Fishlegs said as his body began to quiver.

"Strangely that's not too surprising." Gobber interjected.

"So what do we do?" Stoick asks.

"We must find a way to morph the spell and use the markings against Hadrian. To do this, we must consult every aspect of the witchcraft world."

"Then tell us what to do, we want to help Hiccup." Heather pleaded.

"To reverse this curse, we're going to need more than just a few simple spells." Grandmamma stated. "It won't be easy, but it can be done."

She snaps her fingers, and in a flash of bright light, the number of books had doubled. And with a wave of her hand, large handfuls began to levitate and swirl around everyone. Fishlegs hid behind Hiccup as they swirled around and around, opening to specific pages on their own, then closing and another opening in its place.

"These are the ones that should be useful to us. More than six thousand pages of spells, charms and incantations." She said.

"That's a lot of reading." Hiccup said, but he smiled, and this made everyone's mood feel lighter.

"These are just the basics. Now for more powerful magic, we must turn to these pages." Grandmamma said.

Everyone then spent the night reading and hoping that they would find something that would help. It was actually quite enjoyable since everyone seems to have a sense of humor. They've only been through an eighth of the books and already Snotlout started complaining. Thankfully the rather, motivational words from Gobber made him go back to searching.

As Hiccup was going through an old brown book, made of parchment and leather, Astrid comes up with another stack, then amusingly peeking out from behind. It made Hiccup chuckle as they continued the search. Hours must've passed, possibly days; it was a long night, and still nothing. And yet somehow, no one felt fatigue.

They kept going, they kept searching, and kept reading. Grandmamma

would serve meals and water, and frankly Hadrian seemed pretty quiet. He must know they're doing something he must know Hiccup stands a chance, and he should be quiet. Because with these spells and incantations, he won't stand a chance.

As Hiccup closed another book and placed it on top of the pile his height, he sighed. He leaned back into a shelf and hugged his knees, leaning his head against the shelf. He stared up at the torches and listened as people sniffed through more books and quietly conversed back and forth. Hiccup ruffles his hair and sighs.

"Tired?" a soft voice asks. Hiccup looks up and sees Heather with her hands coated in dust.

"More like curious." He replied. She gave him a questioning looks as she sat down next to him, crossing her legs. "Hadrian's been quiet lately."

"Guess even evil spirits need to sleep." She jokes.

"No, I mean. He hasn't made the marks glow, and I haven't heard his voice all night." Hiccup says.

"Are you saying that's a bad thing?" Heather asks while opening one of the books Hiccup already checked.

"I'm saying maybe he knows what we're doing. And, I think I want to talk to him."

He heard the sound of a book clapping to the floor. He looks to Heather and she's gone to serious and fear. Her green eyes ask if he's serious.

Hiccup only nods in return.

Candles in groups of three surrounded the circle of open spellbooks. Hiccup walks up and takes a deep breath and Grandmamma traces what looks like sparkling salt into a giant circle around the books.

"You sure you want to do this?" Fishlegs asks.

Hiccup only nods.

"Look Hiccup, you don't have to do this." Astrid says, placing a gentle hand on his arm.

"Yes, I do." Hiccup says.

He steps into the circle and sits at the epicenter, just as Grandmamma instructed. "Now, concentrate. Find your center, and take deep breaths." She instructed.

Hiccup took a deep breath, and closed his eyes.

"Palms up." he heard her whisper.

Hiccup stayed like this, breathing deeply. For a while nothing really happened. Then the marks trailed up his body and the trinity on his forehead beaconed over the entire place. Hiccup took a deep breath.

He spoke within his head, I know you're there. Hiding. What's wrong? Afraid I won't give in?

"You can, and you will." He replied.

If I can't stop you, they will, Hiccup stated.

"You know better than to fill your head with senseless ideas." He stated.

Hiccup's eyes opened, and he found the shack and his friends gone. In its place, the skeletal black forest he now so easily recognized. In his chest, his heart began to pound, rushing blood to his ears and adrenaline through his system. He could feel the presence in the room. It was like a tiny vibration humming in the air.

"I am always with you, Hiccup. You're a part of me, as I am to you. Forever."

Get. Out. Hiccup ordered.

The world of ash and charcoal whipped and tossed.

"You can't stop me Hiccup. No one can. And these spells may buy you time, but you're only delaying the inevitable."

The tangled boughs of the twig-trees scrambled back and forth, clawing wildly at one another. The ash swirled in wild cyclones and blustered in sandstorm clouds. Still, no sound of the chaos reached him.

Or maybe you're just setting yourself up for destruction, Hiccup snapped back.

In an instant, a blaze of white fire crashed into his chest. Hiccup felt every rib in his body crash into his lungs. The blaze of fire singeing his clothes and hair. He expected blood to flood into his lungs as he crashed to ground, ash clinging to his clothes, binding him to the ground. Hiccup coughed, but only disturbed more ash, no blood.

"It's not your place to decide what to do." Hadrian stated. "In case you didn't know, I am the one with all the power. I am the one who decides. You don't have a choice. In fact, you're more like my lackey."

"I will not give you my body." Hiccup declared.

"You don't really have a choice. I'm taking it."

Suddenly, Hiccup rose from the ash and fisted his hands. Balls of what could only be described as lightning sparked and flickered in his hands. They were the size of a Monstrous Nightmare's eyeball. Hiccup raised them over his head and blasted a lone stream of light toward Hadrian, but he merely blocked it with his hand. Not even flinching.

The beam disappeared into his hands, as if he were absorbing it. "I see you picked up a few things from Heather's elder." He stated.

"I have a good memory." Hiccup said. He fisted his hands again and the balls reappeared.

"Ha! You think you're strong enough to beat me?" Hadrian mocked.  
"This, is real power."

Hadrian's whole body suddenly had an ominous red glow around him. His eyes were the deadliest color of red, and his clothes and hair, along with pebbles and rocks floated around him. Hadrian hovered one hand over the other, and a small red fireball ignited and grew in the middle. And as he raised it above his head like Hiccup, it grew larger by the second.

As big as a full-grown Gronkle. It glowed and blanketed the entire land and Hiccup in red. It glowed so bright, Hiccup had to cover his eyes, but that was the mistake. Hadrian slammed it to the ground and the entire thing shattered. Hiccup went flying back, skipping across the dirt like a stone on water.

Once he looked up, Hadrian was still standing with two more balls ready on each hand. He walked over to Hiccup, standing over him. Towering like an impending shadow.

"I always was the better fighter, Hiccup."

Hiccup stared him down as Hadrian took raised on hand blasted Hiccup.

Outside, everyone stood on edge as Hiccup had fallen into a deep trance. Eyes closed, marks glowing, he didn't say one word.

"Hadrian's contacted him." Astrid said. "We have to help!"

She was about to step into the circle, when Grandmamma's vicious arm lashed out like a viper. "NO! You mustn't. If you disturb the meditation, it could be fatal."

Back in Hiccup's mind, he and Hadrian stood, facing each other. Hiccup had pushed himself up, not willing to lose just yet.

"You're friends can't stop me, and neither can you. How many times do I have to tell you?" Hadrian said. "How can you bare to watch them suffer?"

"How are they suffering?" Hiccup asked.

"Can't you see the pain in their eyes when they look and see you talking to nothing? They fear for you, Hiccup."

"It's because they care. Unlike you. Why do you even want to be free? No one care about you at all!" Hiccup railed.

"Trust is for the weak. Fear is the only way to make them do what you want. Even you fear me." Hadrian said. "I don't need any friends. I'm simply looking out for number one. That's the way it's always been."

"Sounds pretty lonely." Hiccup said.

"I don't need your sympathy, in fact I just don't want it." He said, and he blasted Hiccup again for emphasis.

Hiccup plowed into a rock side and slid down to the ground in time to watch Hadrian stalk closer. "I don't understand. What did I ever do to make you hate me?" Hiccup asked.

"You were born."

Then with another blast, Hiccup gets blinded by the light and feels a huge wave of power devour him. Thunder rumbled around him and in a flash, he felt himself thrown back. He felt himself travel through worlds until he crashed into his own skin. In a crack of lightning, and a pound of thunder, his eyes flew open.

He gasped and was soon caught in a mixture of coughing and wheezing as his father and friends stared at him in relief and fear. He looked at his hands, his arms, legs, and the marks were gone. He quickly scrambled up and out of the circle. He crashed into his father, and thankfully Stoick gripped him, preventing him from falling.

"Are ya' all right son?" he asked.

"Yeah, yeah." Hiccup said between breaths.

"Did you see Hadrian?" Fishlegs asked.

"Seen him. Heard him. Felt him." Hiccup stated. "We need to keep looking."

"Very well." Grandmamma said. "Our best chance is to find that mark." She pointed to a rough sketch of the symbol on Hiccup's forehead.

He darted to the back of the library. He heard someone call after him, but he didn't listen. He sped-walk all the way to the back and continued to search through mounds of books. He heard no one come and join him, but he didn't mind.

Hadrian's power had grown, and while they won't exist in the real world, as long as Hadrian inhabited his mind, there's no telling what he's capable of. Hiccup had had enough. He'd search through every page in every book in the room.

He was done.

## 8. Chapter 7

After endless hours of scanning through books, people soon began to take shifts. Some would look through books while others would rest. Then at a certain time, they'd switch. But no one took Hiccup's place, he didn't want anyone too. He'd search for the marking if it killed him. That would actually be a benefit.

Astrid and the others searched through books that surrounded the history of the mark while Stoick and Gobber looked at any languages that could've used the mark for any occasions.

Astrid walks up on Fishlegs as he's flipping through pages looking

for something similar to the mark. "Any luck?" she asks.

"Astrid we've been looking at this all night. I'm starting to think there's nothing else there." He says, the fatigue clearly affecting him.

"There has to be. Keep looking." She orders.

Fishlegs sighs in aggravation as he takes another book from a mound at the corner of his desk. "Search for the Symbol, book 304."

Astrid walks up to Gobber as he's writing down notes. "Gobber anything?"

"I've cross-matched that symbol with every language cryptic writing known to Vikings." He tells.

"And?"

"Nothing. Whatever it is, it's definitely foreign to us." He declares.

Meanwhile, Hiccup had secluded himself in one corner of the room, surrounded by towers of books that he mixed of one he did and didn't read. At some point in time, Goathi had ridden back with his father to retrieve her gathering of books and hopefully compare books.

Once Hiccup was certain he looked through every book Grandmamma had, he took it upon himself to look through all of Goathi's books, by himself. But they weren't showing much promise. He had at least four books on podiums surrounding him. He would flip through one, and then move to the next, flipping more pages.

"Come on. It's my body, my decision. There has to be a way to stop him. I know there is." He says as he turns the pages of a royal blue book with silver lining bordering the cover. "I just need a little help finding it."

He shifted to a notebook bounded in black leather. He grabs the pages and flips through them from the back. Then the pages suddenly fall, that they do when on section of the book was visited more often than the others. He leaves it open, but doesn't see anything that could be useful.

Then he cocks his head to the side, squints, and sees a corner of the pages turned up. He grabs it with both hands, and flicks at it until he can grip it with his thumb. He peels back the page and sees a flash of red appear. He forced himself to peel back until Hiccup realizes the pages were stuck together, purposefully. As if no one wanted anyone to see this.

Finally, the page revealed the trinity marking that was on Hiccup's forehead. Hiccup gasps as he grabs the book. "No, no this has to be wrong."

"Hiccup?" a voice called. The sudden sound scared Hiccup into dropping the book to the floor, but it still fell open to the page. The voice had called from behind several shelves, and Hiccup recognized it as Astrid. "Any luck finding it?"

Hiccup glanced down, and flipped the books closed with his toes, then sliding it under a nearby vanity. "Uh, no it's not in any of Goathi's books."

Astrid poked her head out from behind a tower of books leaning against the occupied shelves. "Are you okay Hiccup?" she asks. "You look really, pale." Her face a show of concern.

"It's nothing Astrid, I just haven't had a good night sleep in awhile, that's all."

"Look Hiccup, I know Hadrian scared you, but I promise you, we will find a way to stop him." she promised, placing a comforting hand on Hiccup's shoulder.

Her determination should make him feel better, give him hope, but instead, Hiccup's eyes watered, and he suddenly began to sob. Astrid said nothing as she pulled him into a hug. Hiccup hoped she didn't think she made him upset, he was losing it. And the thought of what Hadrian said, about them fearing for him.

Hiccup wrapped his arms around her neck. He fights to talk through his sobs and sniffles. "I can't do this, Astrid. I can't take it anymore."

"Shh, it's okay Hiccup." She coos to him. "We'll stop him."

"He won't leave me alone. I can't sleep, I can't look without seeing him. I can't take it." Hiccup cried. He never felt so broken.

Astrid pushes him off and cups his face. "You have to be strong, you can't let him think he's won." She wipes away tears with her thumbs.

Staring into Hiccup's eyes, it almost made her own water. She'd never seen him like this. In fact, she'd rarely seen Hiccup cry, before all this. He always had a fierce determination, and his sarcastic personality made him appear like nothing could scare him, shake him. And now, he's already giving up on trying to stop Hadrian. It wrenches her heart to the point where it hurts.

Not knowing any words of comfort, not that they would bring him any, she simply improvises with a soft kiss on his forehead. Maybe showing him her more soft side will help. It seemed to work, because Hiccup squeezed his eyes shut and he raised his hands and placed them over hers, intertwining their fingers. Hiccup takes a shaky breath and lets out another soft sob.

"You need to rest. Why don't you go join Fishlegs and take a break?" she asks, brushing a few stray hairs out of Hiccup's eyes.

"Okay." Hiccup says without protest. As he lets Astrid lead the way, he glances back over his shoulder to memorize where the book now lies, and hopefully it'll stay like that undisturbed until tomorrow.

As he walks into the main room, he finds Toothless snuggled down by a fireplace he must've ignited himself. His ears perk, then his head follows. He coos and Hiccup walks over and strokes the Night Fury's head.

Hiccup was about to settle down when he hears his father call.  
"Hiccup, why don't you fly back to Berk? We'll handle this."

Hiccup was more than happy to get away from all these spells and scrolls, and he didn't even mind when Stoick asked the rest of the kids to go home with him. After spending at least four days suffocated in the stuffy room, he was happy to go home, snuggle down in his bed, and just sleep.

After saying goodbye to his father, and after Stoick letting him know they'd be back later tonight, they follow Hiccup up and watch as they take off on their dragons.

Once they landed back home, Hiccup said nothing to no one as he lazily sauntered into his home and up the stairs to bed. He didn't even help himself to any leftovers as he was too tired, and had long lost his appetite.

He settled into bed and watched as Toothless hopped onto his bed, igniting it as he always did, and for a brief moment, he felt a sense of normality. Toothless settled down and laid with his tail just brushing his nose. Hiccup rolled to his side and stared at the candle that he usually blew out before bed, but instead, left it on. He even reached up and retrieved the stuffed Nadder his mother made as comfort.

Unfortunately, his dreams were not as peaceful as he'd hoped. He ended up back into the black forest that he recognized so easily now. And whenever they were around, so was Hadrian. Above him, there was a swirl of a storm-ridden sky. Ash floated through his ankles as the wind draped them to new places, including his eyes. He closed them as best he could but some had already made their mark on his eyes.

Like a mirage, a dark figure emerged in his blurred vision. It surfaced through the clouds of fog and ash and moved toward him like death itself, face blurred and half hidden from view. He shuddered. He had no time to pull away or even move before the figure seized him. A rough hand clamped over his mouth, stopping a shout before it could emerge.

Hadrian dragged him to one side of the forest despite his struggling, and reaching a cave, he pulled back one corner of a heavy worn tapestry, one that depicted a dragon trampling its rider. He thrust him inside. Hiccup rolled across the cold and damp stone floor. He looked up to find himself inside a hidden passageway. And inside this passageway, a tripod torch burned yellow-orange.

Its flame threw jagged shapes across the masonry. He soon watched Hadrian duck inside and emerge above him, all towering height and grimness. Hiccup scampered backward until he met with the damp wall.

"You have no idea how much trouble you're in." a muffled voice spoke.

Smooth and yet ever sharp with admonishments, it was a voice he recognized immediately. Bile rose at the back of Hiccup's throat, along with a scream. Hiccup scrambled up and bolted down the passageway. He didn't know where it would take him, but anywhere to

get away from Hadrian. The passageway grew colder, narrower, and more mazelike. His breath clouded in front of him, visible even in the fading light.

"Run all you like." He said. Hiccup looked back and saw him walking, but his voice sounded like he was right next to him. "It won't make a difference. Every step just brings you closer to me."

Hiccup remembered him saying that at the cabin. And suddenly, out of nowhere, he crashes into Hadrian, and while he didn't throw Hiccup off, he held him there.

"You can't run from me Hiccup." He said.

He broke away from him, laughing, and released Hiccup with a shove before dispersing, unraveling into coils of smoke. Hiccup fell, tumbling in a sprawl. Suddenly insubstantial, the ground shattered beneath him. He fell through, and the scream within him broke loose at last. He watched as the cave-like setting faded into the familiar gray sky, bits of the brown cave morphing into icy-glass blue.

Hiccup crossed his arms over his face, shielding his eyes from the jagged shards of icy glass that winked around him in the blackness, threatening to shred him. He toppled until he jarred to a halt, caught by several sets of arms that dipped him into a low cradle. Glass rained like lethal confetti, a shard embedding itself in his shoulder, another slicing his ankle. He felt another toss, and felt his back slam into hard ground with a bone-jarring slam.

He opened his eyes to find high above him, a shattered black skylight opened to reveal the cave. Hiccup propped himself on his elbows, and felt his body shiver when he realized he was at the very bottom of a cold grave. His heart jarred at the sight of it, fear tightening his chest.

Nearby a mound of dirt awaited, pricked by the spade ends of several shovels. Their handles, like needles in a pin cushion, stood erect from the pile, ready to be put to task. In front of the mound, as a marker, loomed a tall, shrouded statue. A long hooded robe concealed the form's entire head and swathed its arms, which were held open over the gaping maw of the black grave.

Hiccup squeezed his eyes shut and opened them again. But he didn't wake up. The scene remained. The grave remained around him. It was all the same, only now Hadrian walked up and stared down at him. The lower half of his body obscured from view. Hiccup pushed himself to stand, spitting ash from his mouth. He wiped sweat and grit from his eyes and leveled a defiant glare up at him.

"Let me out!" Hiccup shouted.

Hadrian only laughed and heaved dirt into the hole. A rush of ash burst forth from the grave. Hiccup drew a sharp breath, his heart pounding so hard that it started a ringing in his ears. This was insane. They were going to bury him alive, and he couldn't do anything about it.

"Please! Let me out!" Hiccup screeched. "Please!" he shrieked, banging and scratching at the dirt of the open grave.

Hadrian looked down, his glistening fiendish gaze fell on him. He raised his hand over the open grave, over Hiccup. His fingers curled one at a time into a slow fist. Beneath him, Hiccup felt the ground tremble, the shudder. Above him, the edges of his enclosure quivered.

Dirt and rock loosening until, at last, they broke forth in a tidal surge. Earth poured over him in rushing waves from all sides. It fell against his body in heavy clods, a suffocating weight that fast became crushing.

"No!" Hiccup screamed, flailing.

He thrashed, battling to loosen himself from the raining soil and ash that threatened to consume him. He fought to stand once again, causing the dirt to press more tightly around him. It claimed his legs, trapping him. Hiccup reached with both arms toward the edge of the grave, toward the open sky, but the earth gushed, building to his waist, to his chest. It piled past his shoulders, his head, and now raced to consume his arms, swallowing the light one fragment at a time.

With it went the vision of trees, the gravestones, the ashen sky, and the stone-cold glare, and evil smile of Hadrian.

The growing silence seared his mind. Hiccup arched against the constricting earth, the enclosing darkness. His dirt prison shifted in answer to his movements, compressing.

Out! He needed to get out!

With his mouth clamped shut, he unleashed a scream from the back of his throat. But who would hear? He couldn't move his arms. His legs. Anything. Panicked, he realized he'd been holding his breath. The packed dirt squeezed his chest, crushed his lungs. He couldn't breathe!

He gasped involuntarily and was rewarded with a mouthful of coarse grime. He swallowed and his body convulsed at the acrid taste. His lungs burned for air. His heat knocked hard against his rib cage, begging for release.

If he didn't get out, he was going to die. He knew it. He was going to die.

Mom. He thought her name over and over in his head. Mom, where are you?!

No answer came to him, and gradually he grew still again. Locked in the earth's suffocating embrace, he listened to the flutter of his heart, the only sound in his ears as, beat by beat, its rhythm began to slow. Its thump reminded him of the sound of a drum, the drums that played happy rhythmic beats during Snoggletog songs.

Tears priced at his eyes. How could he die when he promised he'd rid himself of the vermin that invaded his mind? When everyone was waiting for him? His father coming upstairs and finding his son not breathing. Died in his sleep. He squeezed his eyes and felt the tears leave him, stolen by the absorbing dirt that had taken his breath,

and with it his final hope.

Something cool grazed the very tips of his fingers. That was when he realized that they must be the only bit of him still above ground. His waning consciousness told him it was the wind. The sensation came again, and Hiccup flexed his fingers and felt the soft brush of . . . skin?

All at once, the crushing pressure pushing down on him lightened. Something drove into the dirt, and Hiccup latched at once to the arm that plunged to grasp his. It pulled, and he felt himself being dragged up one inch at a time. The dirt fell away, releasing him from its death grip. His head broke the surface.

He gasped.

Coughing, Hiccup lurched forward, sucking in cool gulps of air, his lungs battling to expel hunks of dark gray soot. But nothing came. There wasn't even any dirt anymore. He was back in his bed, coughing, the quilt entangled in his legs, his heart beating rapid.

Hiccup took a look at his hands and saw they were an unusual shade of white. He went rigid, going completely numb. His heart was beating as if it just restarted. No, it couldn't be true.

Did he really just die?

Hiccup licked his lips, and they were very dry. Hiccup rushes downstairs, ignoring the soon to come headache and dizziness that was bound to come. He burst into the bathroom and looked into the reflective surface of the metal shield.

He practically was a ghost. His lips were just fading out of that shade of purple that the dead had. His skin was porcelain white, slowly switching to that Yam pale brownish color. His eyes were icy green, and slowly, he watched as the pupil tortuously dilated in and out, and the green's usual color bleeding back to a warm glow.

Hiccup dropped to his knees. He didn't stop the tears that poured down his cheek. He sobbed and sobbed until he was sure there was nothing left. He clutched his middle to dull the pain that pinched his left side. He began to rock back and forth, and while every breathe was like a blessing, he knew he couldn't deny it any longer.

He couldn't face him.

If Hadrian had the power to nearly kill him while dreaming, he was too dangerous to keep inside. Hiccup felt immensely pathetic he practically watched his ego and remarks crumble before his eyes.

He'd lost.

He felt so humiliated.

A strange sound came from his lips. A combination of dread and sorrow, giving voice to his despair.

"You win." He whispered.

"You \_win\_!"

## 9. Chapter 8

Hiccup sat at the kitchen table, staring down into the floating bits of fish in his breakfast bowl, feeling not unlike day-old roadkill — soggy, drained, and flattened. He was achy and congested, too; like little magic bunnies had visited him sometime during the whole official four hours he'd slept and stuffed his head full of wet cotton.

Every noise — the clank of dishes in the sink, the shuffle of footsteps in the hall, the crinkle of his dad's parchment paper — sounded as though it was coming from somewhere deep underground.

Sometime last night, while Hiccup had managed to hide his evidence of his breakdown, he heard his father come home from Heather's grandmother's. He heard him walk up the steps, and Hiccup simply turned to his side, faking his slumber as his father's presence slowly faded. When Hiccup was sure he was downstairs, he simply stayed like that until his body decided it was ready to sleep.

He now focused on how to free himself from Hadrian. Getting off the island shouldn't be a problem, and if people want to come, he's positive they'll give him his space. He needed Goathi and Grandmamma's help for sure. It'll take a while to convince them, especially after what Grandmamma had said about not letting Hadrian out.

Every time Hiccup thought about how he'd lost to him, how all his bravado and promises just swirled like a whirlpool down the rabbit-hole, it makes him cringe, and more tears threaten to break from his eyes. Hiccup blinks them away and stirs his bowl of now cold and soft fish stew.

"You're awfully quiet, son." Stoick said as he finished copying something from his notebook.

"Just a little, tired." He replies.

"Still didn't sleep well, huh?"

"You have no idea." Hiccup mumbled.

"Do you want to go for a ride, son? Maybe it's clear your head." Stoick suggests.

Hiccup sees his window of opportunity and drops his spoon. It clatters loudly against the table. He launched from his seat. He raced down the hall, then burst through the front door. The morning air hit him cold, its moisture flooding his lungs, reawakening all the pangs from past night. A deep ache seeped from his bones and resurfaced in his muscles as he forced himself to move. Wet grass whipped at the hem of his shoe and prostatic foot.

He met Toothless around back where he must've gotten out through the skylight. He must've mentioned Stoick mention a flight. Hiccup

approaches Toothless pet his snout.

"Look bud, whatever happens, I just need you to trust me. Okay?" he tells.

Toothless coos in confusion, but Hiccup only hugs his best friend, then mounting, locking his foot in place. The two take off and fly around the island and swooping down to hover over the forest. The whipping wind helps clear Hiccup's nose and helped him flick away the tears that wet his eyes.

He keeps his gaze straight ahead as he can see Toothless cock his head to looks at him. He lands Toothless at Goathi's front door and knocks. The door opens in an instant and he sees the worried look of Goathi. Just looking at her, Hiccup's eyes watered. He looked away and wiped them away with the sleeve of his tunic.

Goathi places a hand on his shoulder. "Please help me." he whimpered.

She draws back, hesitant.

"Please, Goathi. You need to help me get him out!" Hiccup begged. He grabbed bother her shoulders. "He nearly killed me last night! I woke up, and my lips were purple!"

Goathi's eyes widened, clearly she didn't anticipate Hadrian to have this much power. She steps back to write on the wood in front of her. She asked why he was giving up so soon. It wasn't like him.

"I don't know! Okay?! I don't know!" Hiccup shouted. "I know I'm usually so cool and so sarcastic about everything, but this is different! I can't explain how, but it is! And if he has the power to kill me while sleeping, then there's no telling what else he could do!" Hiccup preached. "Look, if I can't fight him in my dreams then I can fight him in reality."

Goathi looks to him in confusion, and clearly unconvinced.

"Look, in the dream world, Hadrian has unstoppable power. I've tried to fight back, but I'm not a dreamer. I'm too connected to how things would play out in reality. If I get hit, and I know it would hurt in the real world, then it hurts in the dream." Hiccup explained. "I know I haven't put much effort into fighting back in my dreams, but at least in reality, I'll know the only damage he can make is with a sword instead of magic flaming balls."

Goathi strokes her chin, pondering over Hiccup argument.

"Look, Goathi, you're the only one I've told this to. I need help." Hiccup begs.

>Please, I can't do this anymore. He won't leave me alone, and I can't take it anymore."<p>

Finally she sighs and nods her head. Hiccup smiles, grateful. He hugs her and escorts her to Toothless. The three managed to make it out of the village unnoticed. They fly on the familiar route they took to Grandmamma, and soon after they saw the canoe in the daylight, Hiccup lands Toothless and they take the boat to the cabin.

Hiccup didn't even have to knock. As soon as he stepped in front of the door, it swung open with force, and there stood Heather's grandmother, a glare on her face.

"I have a lot of explaining to do, don't I?" Hiccup sarcastically asks.

"Oh you bet you do honey!" she says.

Hiccup steps in, over the threshold and makes his way down to the cellar, and is more than relieved to find the book he'd slid under the vanity, still in the same spot. Even gathered a thin covering of dust. He blows off the pesky filth and brushes any access webs off.

He walks over to the podium and opens to the page that he last remembers seeing the mark. "This says that whoever possesses this mark is bound to commit crimes or possess a fate of true devastation. You told me that this was just to expel evil spirits."

"It all depends on whom the marks come from. If they come from good sorcerers or magic beings, then they're used for good, but if for evil, then, well you get the point." Grandmamma says. "All about the good witch or the bad witch."

"Look, I know I said that I would fight back, but . . ."

"He's just too strong." Grandmamma finished for him. "I know. I had a vision last night, Hiccup. You were there. And I witnessed what that boy can do."

Hiccup froze as he scanned over another paragraph. "Wait, you saw?" he emphasizes.

"Yes, and may I tell you, while that boy is easy on the eyes, what an evil he possesses." She says with a wave of her hand.

"So, when I was buried in the grave . . ." Hiccup's words dissolve like salt in his mouth.

"That was me."

Hiccup turns to her, eyes wet. "Thank you. But why didn't you help me?" he asks.

"I wanted to see how much grip you have on controlling your dreams, and apparently not enough. Barely, even." She says.

"Oh geez, thanks." Hiccup retorts.

"You must learn to change your dreams, Hiccup. It is there, in that realm, that you hold the ability to control your surroundings, as long as they don't control you first. That grave, you could've flown out of it." Grandmamma explains.

Hiccup stared at her sunken eyes, disbelieving.

"But, I'll admit to you. Even if you had found a way, Hadrian has already dominated your dream realm. Even if you had more power than you possess, you would not stand a chance."

"Gee thanks. That makes me feel better." Hiccup snaps.

"It's a harsh reality Hiccup. You must live with it." She answers.

Hiccup takes a deep breath and sighs. "So obviously you know why I'm here."

Grandmamma nods. "I do. And after seeing what Hadrian can do, and what he knows, I do feel that it's best if we do free him."

Hiccup turns to her in disbelief. He'd imagined that Grandmamma would've been the most difficult to convince since she's the one who's going to help him. He'd never expected her to just simply go along for the ride. Such a surprise caught Hiccup off guard and left him bewildered.

"I know, I wasn't expecting anything either. But if fighting him I reality is easier, then so be it." She says.

"What about the fate you mentioned? About him taking control of my body, what will happen if he does?" Hiccup asks. This was the one question that's been buzzing in his mind like a hive of agitated honey bees.

"I don't know how far Hadrian will go, but if that should happen, then I've already planned ahead." She says. She walks over to the vanity and pulls out a drawer, and pulls out a brand new hard-cover book that was a royal blue color with exquisite trim bordering the outside. At the center of the cover, there was, to Hiccup assumption, yet another strange marking, but something about his one seemed more, protective.

"What is that?" Hiccup asks as he moves the book on the podium to make room for the other.

"This is a special symbol that traps evil spirits between these two covers, forever locking them in their own world, where nothing can get in or out without being released." Grandmamma explains. "I've used this book in the past, and no spirit was a match for its power."

"So what are we going to do with it?" Hiccup asks.

"Well, this is m plan." Grandmamma says. "If you were to give into Hadrian earlier than expected, then the plan was to free him from you, and trap his essence in here. Then if we could, we would've guided your spirit back into your body."

"Wow," Hiccup says, braising his fingertips along the gold trim.  
"Good plan."

"But there is a downside." She adds.

"What?" Hiccup groans.

"Hadrian has to be weak in order for the book's powers to fully grab him and drag him in. if he can still fight back, then the book's magic will ware off." She explains.

"I can try. If, I'll still be able to help." Hiccup says. "If not, then my friends can handle it."

As Hiccup's fingers traced over the mark at the center of the book, the hope that it ignited in his chest was, overwhelming. Its power could be felt. As if it was emanating, or humming from the inside. The hum vibrated through the bones of his hands and up his arms. This thing had power.

"So when do we start?" Hiccup asks.

"We shall start at midnight. There's a full moon, that's when my powers are at their highest."

"Somehow that's not too surprising." Hiccup jokes.

He soon hears Toothless call from outside. He jogs out and sees his dragon stuck in the muggy swamp water. He pulls at his foot and looks to Hiccup. Hiccup smiles and giggles as he hustles over to the canoe and snatches the paddle. He helps Toothless pry his foot free. Toothless wipes away the mud on the dirt and Hiccup walks over and pets his snout.

"Um, Grandmamma, can I ask you something?" He asks.

"Yes?"

"Well, Toothless was under the control of the dragon too. And when he got brainwashed, he lost his memory too. If there a chance he could have a Doppelganger as well?" Hiccup asks as Toothless purrs.

"Dragons are more strong-willed than humans, so it seems unlikely." She bluntly says. And Hiccup only feels the constricting grip of relief.

He continues to pet Toothless as he hears the two elder women converse behind him. He would hear the scraping of Goathi's staff and Grandmamma would reply. No doubt they were planning out the event. The more Hiccup thought about it, the more nervous he became. But no amount of nerves or fear could make him change his mind. Even the begs and pleas from Astrid and his father would mean nothing.

He wanted this done, and if Grandmamma was willing to do it, then Hiccup had to be doing the right thing.

And that's all he needed to suppress his guilt.

Toothless cooed and Hiccup scratched under his chin. He purred and Hiccup weakly smiled. "Look bud," he started, and Toothless looked to him. "I know this isn't the best idea I've had. But trust me, this is for everyone's own good."

Toothless cocks his head to the side, squinting his eyes in that stare people give you when their questioning your decisions. Hiccup just strokes his snout as he peers to the sky. It was late afternoon. He should get back and rest. No telling how much strength he'll need for this.

He gets up from his spot and brushes off his pants. He turns to Goathi and Grandmamma. They had both gone inside. Hiccup walks up the steps and peers in through the doorway. The two elder women were sitting around Grandmamma's fireplace, enjoying a cup of tea, or whatever it is that Grandmamma served.

Hiccup steps over the threshold and looks to them. They must've felt his gaze because Grandmamma was the first to turn, and Goathi following her line of vision.

"I'll be heading back." Hiccup says.

"Okay, remember, midnight. And get some rest." Grandmamma informs.

Hiccup nods and turns to Goathi. "Do you want a ride back?" and she simply shakes her head.

"She'll be staying with me making preparations for the, ceremony." Grandmamma says with air quotes around the word ceremony.

Hiccup nods and leaves the women there. He flies back to Berk and the sun was inches from the horizon. Its reflection stretching across the water until it casted its golden curtain across Berk. A beautiful bronze gold blanketed the village. Hiccup stared out until he felt a hand clamp on his shoulder.

He turns and finds Astrid. A hand on her hip and a small smile on her lips. "There you are. Where were you? Your dad said you were going for a fly, but you've been gone for hours."

"It was a long flight." Hiccup plainly says.

And that was all she needed to hear, "Hiccup, what's going on?" she asks.

"Nothing, Astrid. I just needed to get away, that's all." He says.

"It's more than that, I can tell. We have a bond Hiccup." She says, lacing her hand in his.

Hiccup nearly started crying again. He withdrew his hand and turned and started walking.

"Hiccup." Astrid says, confused, and clearly worried. Most likely thinking she'd done something wrong.

Hiccup stops dead in his tracks, he turns his head slightly to the side, "Astrid, can I ask you something?"

He wasn't sure, but he could've sworn he'd seen her blush. "Uh, sure."

"You wouldn't hold back on Hadrian would you?" he asks.

At first she's left bewildered, but goes on to answer, "No, I wouldn't. I knknow that's probably bad but,"

"No, it isn't." Hiccup interrupts. "You need to promise me you won't

hold back."

"Why?" she asks.

"Promise me!" Hiccup shouts as he turns to face her.

"Okay, okay. I promise." She says.

"Good." Hiccup says.

Then with he and Astrid both aware of how close he was, he takes her chin, tilts her head and kisses her lips. He gently holds her other hand in his own. This was something new. Usually Astrid was the one who gave Hiccup kisses. Like for Snoggletog, the Thawfest Games, and when he first defeated the Red Death.

But Hiccup didn't know the outcome of what was going to happen, and if he didn't make it, he at least wanted to remember that feeling.

The butterflies in his stomach whenever Astrid was near him. Her soft lips, with that innocent shade of pink. The way her bangs overlap her eyes and how she has to constantly brush them out of her eyes.

When they pull back, her cheeks are a pale shade of pink. He stares into her sapphire eyes and nearly feels his own eyes water. He releases her hand and steps back. Astrid doesn't say anything, but Hiccup could assume that Astrid feels something is wrong. Hiccup never kissed her.

"Hiccup?" she starts.

"I need to go." He says turning away.

"But Hiccup . . ." She was about to reach out, but Toothless jumps in front of her, hissing with a grimace. "Toothless? Hiccup! Hiccup what's going on?" she calls.

Hiccup stops and turns his head to the side. "Just trust me, Astrid. Remember our promise. Don't hold back."

Then Hiccup turns and walks back to his house. Toothless follows slowly behind, still watching Astrid. And once Hiccup shuts the door, Toothless retreats back and enters the house through the skylight.

As Hiccup wiggled himself under the cover of his quilt, he dozes off hoping he's doing the right thing.

## 10. Chapter 9

\*\*~ Hey guys, just thought I'd add, if you want to get the feeling for this chapter, listen to "Hurt" conducted by Thomas Bergerson. The song adds great dramatic effect to the story. Listen to it right as Hiccup's chanting.~ Hope you guys like the update! :D Xxx\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup's eyes fluttered open as he rolled over to his back to see

the moon's position. He woke up just in time. But it was close to midnight and he needed to hurry to get there. He tosses off the quilt and slowly walks over to Toothless. He pats the Night Fury's snout, and after watching it wrinkle and twitch, Toothless' eyes open.<p>

"We need to go bud." Hiccup whispers.

He gathers himself together, and after adjusting Toothless' saddle, they fly off with nothing but a single whisper in the night. Hiccup looks to the stars, he'd never seen so many, and it might've been his still dry eyes, but it was as if they were in a wavy line, guiding him to Grandmamma's.

Hiccup tried to memorize every sound and feeling he could. The sound of Toothless' wings flapping in the wind. The way a rush of cool, moist air blasted him in the face, whipping his blonde hair into a frenzy whenever he went flying. The feeling of Toothless' scaly skin, his forked tongue licking his face.

He knew he wasn't helping himself by remaining all the things he could never see again, but he still can't forget the chance that he'll be okay. But the idea that it was a very slim chance discouraged him greatly. He wanted to say goodbye to everyone, but not only would they be suspicious, they'd try and stop him.

Hiccup only prayed the Astrid would at least pick up his, what he considers, major hint. Honestly how could it have been more obvious? It should've at least given her a red flag. And Hiccup kissing her.

Knowing Astrid, her curiosity often leads her to finding out about Hiccup's secret. Like the first time she followed him to the Cove, then there was the time she came to help him find the gift from his mother. She's smart, she's bound to figure it out.

Hiccup held onto this small flicker of hope as he landed in the marsh.

He hopped off Toothless and made his way up the steps. He knocks on the moss covered door and sees Grandmamma and Goathi inside.

"So, are we ready?" Grandmamma asks as she invites Hiccup inside.

"Not quite." Hiccup says. They look to him in confusion.

"Is something wrong?" she asks.

"I just think it'd be best if we just did the ceremony somewhere, barren." He explains.

Goathi and Grandmamma nod their heads in agreement, and while in the marsh would be fine, better safe than sorry.

"Understandable." Says Grandmamma. "But where do you suggest we go?"

"Follow me." Hiccup says.

He steps out of the cabin and jogs to Toothless. He allows Goathi and Grandmamma aboard and with one flap, they're in the air. After a few moments of flying over water, soon Grandmamma peers around Hiccup and sees something in the distance.

"Is that . . ."

"Yes, it is." Hiccup replies without even letting her finish asking.

He swallows heavily as they approach the group of islands in the shape of a man's hand.

Back on Berk, Astrid laid in her bed restless. She couldn't seem to sleep. Something about Hiccup's conversation seemed off. It was as if he wanted her to see something that wasn't there. A bigger picture. Bringing up Hadrian was weird in itself, then telling her not to hold back. She closes her eyes to think better.

Don't hold back. Promise! You won't hold back! You wouldn't hold back on Hadrian. \_

Suddenly her eyes burst open, "No." she whispered.

She quickly jumped out of bed and scrambled to ready Stormfly's saddle. She hopped on and flew to Hiccup's house. She landed on the roof, trying not to disturb Stoick, and looked through the skylight. Hiccup wasn't in bed, and neither was Toothless. Landing Stormfly up front, she rushes in and finds Stoick asleep in his throne-like chair.

Astrid cautiously approached him as he inhaled and let out a large snore. She places her hand on his forearm and gently shakes it. "Sir," she whispered. "Sir."

Stoick awoke with a start, and he looked to find Astrid at his side. "Oh, hello Astrid. You're here late."

"Yeah, and I'm afraid I don't have good news." She said hesitantly.

Stoick's expression changed immediately. His face contorted into a frown as Astrid explained her conversation with Hiccup. The moment she was finished, he rushed upstairs to find Hiccup's bedroom bare.

"Go get the others, I'll get Gobber." He ordered as he headed back downstairs to ready Thornado.

Once everyone was rounded up, they all meet at the Academy, saddle up and rush off to the island. They land in the marsh and the dragon's feet had just made contact with the ground when Stoick and Astrid and Gobber leaped off and bolted for the house. They burst open the door, but are crushed when they find the cottage abandoned.

"These candles were lit recently, so they were here." Gobber confirms.

"They must've gone in the marsh." Astrid says. "But where?"

Stoick walks around the cottage searching for any signs that could indicate where they might've gone. There was nothing. He only finds books, webs and skulls. Suddenly he hears Fishlegs call from outside. Everyone rushes out one by one.

Fishlegs is kneeling down at the muggy ground. "What is it, Fishlegs?" Stoick asks.

"Look at these footprints." He points out. "They lead to the grass then, that's when they must've taken off."

"And how does that help exactly?" Tuffnut asks.

"Well, look at the direction they fly off too." Fishlegs says pointing to the horizon.

"North?" Astrid asks confused.

"Yes, and if my calculations of the stars is correct, if they head in that direction for a good few miles, they'll stumble upon, Breakneck Bog." Fishlegs says with a slight gulp of fear at the mention of the Bog.

"Why would Hiccup go there?" Astrid asks.

"So Hadrian doesn't have anything or anyone to harm." Stoick says aloud. "Come on! We need to get there before they start the ritual!"

Everyone boards their dragons and zoom off to Breakneck Bog. Stoick urgently grips his saddle as he hopes he's not too late.

Hiccup stares up at the moon as the soft glow of candles warm his back. The bog is alive with crickets and frogs. The moon's glow shines its brightest with a cloudless sky. He's been staring at the sky for hours now while Goathi and Grandmamma set up the circle for the ritual. Hoping, praying, that somehow they'd make it in time. So he could see them again. Just once.

"Hiccup," he cringes when he hears Grandmamma call. He turns and sees her standing next to Goathi. "It's time."

Hiccup takes a deep breath and walks over to the two elder women. He stops and looks to see the same salt circle as the one back at the cabin. Only now, trios of candles on long, renaissance candelabrum border the circle. Their flames flicker as the gales kick up. Lanterns drooling some kind of white sweet smelling smoke hang on some branches of trees.

He watches as he steps in, the marks trail up his legs and the trinity mark glows on his forehead as he turns at the center of the circle to face Goathi and Grandmamma. Grandmamma has the book set to trap Hadrian open to the middle set on a podium with another candle in the upper left corner.

Goathi looks and sees Hiccup's head is down. As he raises to gaze at them, tears sting his eyes and trail down his cheek. Goathi's face changes to concern, she manages to get his attention and writes in the dirt, telling him it'll be okay. And that Hadrian will no longer be a problem.

"Hadrian doesn't concern me." he mumbles.

"Okay, ready to begin." Grandmamma says, and Hiccup gives a nod of consent. "Remember the incantation. Just as we learned."

Hiccup nods and lowers his head. He concentrates, finds his center and begins the spell. "Quira mi tirah'ta lieh. Sate'rate masatirri." Hiccup's hair begins to levitate and sway, and his eyes begin to glow the eerie blue. "Agliie nama. Matsa ra'ti, reala-"

"Hiccup!"

"Hiccup!"

Hiccup immediately stops and everything comes to a stillness; but the marks still glow. He doesn't turn as he hears multiple footsteps rushing toward him. The first call came from his father. The second was from Astrid.

He hears them stop a few inches from the circle, and they don't say anything, it's up to Hiccup to shatter the silence. "I was beginning to think you wouldn't catch on." He starts, and he slowly turns to face them. "But you don't disappoint Astrid."

"Hiccup, why are you doing this?" she asks fighting tears.

"I can't take it." He bluntly admits.

"But you said you'd rather lose your sanity than to Hadrian." Fishlegs says.

"Easier said than done." Hiccup counters while turning back to face Goathi and Grandmamma.

"Hiccup, please." His father spoke that time. "You don't have to do this."

"Yes, I do." He turns his head to peer at his father. "Hadrian's too strong in the dream world. At least in reality, I know I stand a chance."

"Yeah, well that all depends on a very big IF Hiccup." Astrid snaps.

"I'm sorry Astrid." Hiccup then turns to face Goathi and Grandmamma.

Hiccup's hair sways once again and the marks glow even brighter. He closes his eyes and lets the energy flow through his body, giving him power like Goathi told him. The salt soon became a solid glowing white line, and waves of prickled light circled and swirled at the edges.

"Hiccup no!" Astrid cried, but as she ran for the circle, in a flash of light and the booming sound of an explosion, she was sent flying back into Gobber.

Everyone could only watch helplessly as Hiccup restarted the

incantation.

"Quira mi tirah'ta lieh. Sate'rate masatirri. Agliie nama." Hiccup suddenly began to levitate and rise at the center, the gales picked up ferociously and the light seemed to be powered by Hiccup's words. The more he chanted, the strong and brighter it became, until it became a full-on cylinder shape, trapping Hiccup inside. "Matsa ra'ti, realahalia!"

At the finish of the chant, Hiccup looked to the sky and opened his eyes. They glowed a fierce icy-blue in clash with the crimson red of the symbols. As if they'd practiced it, Grandmamma began to say her part of the spell.

"Hasberack, admorane. Gostwhenthen verbesnex. Endobrium, dispendrue. Aran sicortis rex!" When she finished, she extended her hands in a V shape up to the sky. A strange red glow, not as ominous as Hiccup's, bloomed from behind her. Bursting like a star with vine-like appendages. Blooming and spreading like it had a destined mind and path.

It flowed to Hiccup, as if there was some unseen attraction or force pulling to him. It permeated the cylinder shape surrounding Hiccup and it mixed in with the white light. Toothless squeals from behind Goathi. For a moment, the two lights mix and shuffle from within one another. But soon the red light morphed until it matched the cryptic markings on Hiccup's body.

They continued to spin in a circle, riding the waves of light around Hiccup. Hiccup roared and as he did, he extended his arms and legs out. The marks flew off his body as if they were bits of paper, and clashed with the light and soon fitted into the matching spots on the light, like little puzzle pieces. With his hands in fists, Hiccup clenched his eyes shut for a moment, lowering his head. He went still for a moment.

"Hiccup!" Stoick cried.

They could see Hiccup's body trembling, shaking, but he didn't budge. Then, as if something inside him ignited, he looked to the sky with a piercing scream. Then two glowing red beacons of light erupted from his eyes and reached up until they scraped the sky. It was like before when Hadrian was chiseling the marks in his skin. Everyone stepped back as a third light shot out of his mouth. His skin began to crack and peel and the eerie red light began to radiate from the cracks.

"Hiccup!" Stoick screamed. He was about to change or the circle when Grandmamma stopped him.

"Stop! If you invade now, there's no telling what could happen to Hiccup!" she shouted over the roar and thunder of the lights.

The book's pages were turning furiously as the winds picked were practically thrashing back and forth. They continued this behavior, and Grandmamma watched as Hiccup's body peeled and cracked. Astrid ran to him but was knocked back by the energy surging from his body.

Everyone watched as a small spark flickered for a moment at the base

of Hiccup's stomach, before it slowly grew wider and larger. It grew as a white light with edges that flicker like the flames of fire, devouring Hiccup's body in the process. As it breached the border light, it shatters outward, sending hundreds of diamond-bright slivers through the air. The ball of white light swallows the last of Hiccup's face, severing the red beacons of light.

Thunder rumbles in the air, or at least they think it's thunder. With every flash that happens, a sound booms so loud it rattles the sky and trembles the ground. For a moment, the circle stays there, hovering over the circle, then it slowly fades into the deadly shades of orange and yellow. The edges of the light shift until they're actually the tips of flames, flying in the wind like ash.

Astrid stepped closer and squinted her eyes. She could barely make out Hiccup's silhouette as it thrashed and flopped from the inside like a fish out of water. She screamed and fell back when she thought she saw a hand bulge out from Hiccup's stomach. Grandmamma gasped, then the book shot her back with a brute force of energy, glowing snow white. Goathi runs to her aid and helps her up.

The circle retracted in for a brief second before it expanded and exploded outward. Everyone went flying back, crashing into trees, grass, stone, or just the hard-packed ground. The flames dispersed and disintegrated as it erupted. Astrid was on her hands and knees and looked over just in time to watch Hiccup's body fall to the ground, unconscious and not moving.

At the center of the circle, a body floated, limp. Arms and legs dangling as he slowly landed to the ground. Smoke blocked any detail. Astrid's heart wrenched as the figure soon found motor control of his limbs. He flexed and bent his fingers and arms, as if testing how they fit. His black hair covered his eyes, but a shudder ran up her spine. Stoick sat up and gazed in horror at his son. He wasn't moving, and he couldn't find the strength to move at the sight of the fiendish figure.

Suddenly, a maniacal laughter bellowed from the apparition. Then they watched as his body became whole. Everything seemed to deflate once his feet touched the ground ever so gently. They watched as he continued to flex his fingers and look at his hands. The laughter grew louder. Haunting. Taunting them.

His foot was the first to step out from the smoke, and with that, the smoke just vanished. Everyone cowered in fear as Hadrian's cold and unforgiving eyes laid upon them from under his bangs. He had gotten more terrifying than last time. It was different seeing him in person. Now he can do more than harm just Hiccup.

He had a one-sleeve tunic that was ripped and torn from possible battles. On his exposed shoulder, he had an armored guard like Astrid's, with chains draping around his bicep. His belt, like Hiccup's had a rope secured around it where it held his whip, leather straps crossed over his torso and connected to a sheath of arrows on his back. Scars adorned his exposed arm and a couple on his face, while his pants had one whole revealing scratch marks, and his own version of Hiccup's prostatic leg.

He grinned a disturbing grimace. His laughing sounding crazier as he stepped closer.

"At last!" He shouted. "The boy IS MINE!"

## 11. Chapter 10

Hadrian rushes through the branches and vines that the moonlight would allow him to see. He spared a look behind him and saw Gobber and Astrid after him. He only smiles as he pulls out his sword and sliced at every branch he could see.

An avalanche of twigs, branches and leaves showered over Gobber, and when Astrid managed to avoid it, Hadrian pulls back a branch and holds it for a second, then lets it swing back. He's rewarded with the sound of it slamming into Astrid's face. He keeps running as he hears her body collapse on the ground.

"Come on now, guys. You'll have to do better than that. I haven't even broken a sweat." He says.

He looks up to the trees and sees them relatively clear. He looks back just in time to see Snotlout swinging a heavy branch. Hadrian skids to a stop and bends his back as the branch swooshed over his head. He slings back up and punches Snotlout right in the nose. Then adding on, slamming his knee into the boy's diaphragm, then while he's doubled over, he chops at his neck and Snotlout falls to the ground.

"You ever have those days where it just feels good to be alive?" he mocks as he continues running through the dark forest.

Back by Grandmamma and Goathi, Stoick had sent the others out while he and Fishlegs stayed enclosed around Hiccup's stiff body. Stoick stroked the boy's hair as he held him close to his chest. He begged to the gods he'd be okay. He knew he was denying the obvious, but it just didn't feel like he was gone.

Stoick didn't care if he couldn't face it. He'd already lost his wife, and that pain was still fresh, like a burn marked on his skin, making sure he'd never forget it. And he'd sworn he'd never lose another family member. He just couldn't face the world all alone.

He looked back down and brushed a few strands of Hiccup's hair out of his face. Hiccup's face was, emotionless. It was just blank. Stoick begged Thor to have him open them again, to show him those emerald green eyes. But he only stayed stiff and asleep like a rag doll.

"Hiccup," Stoick whimpered. "Please, please wake up."

Nothing happened.

Meanwhile, Gobber and Astrid and the others were on Hadrian's trail. Hadrian had been running in a beeline direction. Wherever he was going, he was getting there. Astrid landed right in front of him and Hadrian skidded to a stop. He went to go punch her, but she grabbed his fist and hurled him over her.

But Hadrian flipped and landed with his feet on the trunk, pushed off and slammed his fist right into her diaphragm. He then punched

Snotlout who was coming in from behind, and ended with knocking his feet out from under him. He heard a heavy thump and saw Gobber standing a few feet away.

"Run out of tricks? What's a matter, afraid we've seen them all?!" Gobber called mockingly.

Hadrian only smiled and in a flash he flicked his wrist and sent five daggers flying. Gobber saw it coming and blocked with his axe hand. But the second he lowered it, Hadrian sucker punched him right in the jaw, sending Gobber skipping across the dirt.

"I have my moments." Hadrian replied.

He could hear the whizzing of two knives and whirled around and formed his arms in and X across his chest. Once they were close enough, he whipped his arms out and sent the daggers spinning and slicing into two trees on his left and right. The trees creaked and cracked and Hadrian dashed for Astrid who had thrown them.

She readied herself for a harsh punch, but felt a tackle instead. She squeezed her eyes shut and readied herself, but popped them open when she felt nothing. She looked and saw Hadrian was next to her on one knee. She looks ahead and sees the tree collapsed in front of her. The branches were cracked and she realized she would've been flat if she stayed.

She looked to Hadrian on his feet. "You saved me?"

He took her chin. "I'm not ready to dispose of that pretty face just yet. Don't get your hopes up." and in an instant, he punched her, knocking her out.

Grandmamma comes back out with a washcloth and small bowl of water. She wets it and pats it on Hiccup's forehead. After Stoick trying the Heimlich maneuver, they managed to restore Hiccup's breathing, but his heartbeat was slow and he still won't show any signs of movement.

"He should be fine." Grandmamma assured, but Stoick refused to let go of Hiccup's hand.

His own meat-like mitts swallowed Hiccup's whole. He stroked the back of Hiccup's hand with his thumb and only prayed in his mind.

Hadrian had broken through some foliage and found what he'd been looking for. Grandmamma's boat. She and Gotahi took it while Hiccup flew. He didn't need to have Hiccup's memories to know that.

As he breaks through and charges for the boat, he stops and draws his sword. He lifts it behind his head, and hears a metallic clang. He pushes off and spins down, kicking out Gobber's legs from under him.

"Hm, you've got guts, Gobber. Let's see if I can pound that out of you." Hadrian says as he holds the tip of his sword on Gobber's nose. "Better yet, I'll slice it out of you."

"How could someone like you be trapped inside our little Hiccup?" he asks as he props on his elbows.

"I asked myself that every day I suffered in him, but now, I can call my own shots." He says, and he raises his sword, but it's knocked out of his hand and sent flying behind Gobber.

He looks and sees one of his old abandoned daggers. He turns to find Astrid with another prepped in each hand. He only smiles and abandons Gobber and sprints for her. She wastes her throws as he dodged both and he launched himself into Astrid and the two crashed into the sandy shore. Hadrian uses his momentum and lands on his feet.

"Let's see how you do in hand-to-hand combat." He says.

Astrid stands and shifts to a fighting stance.

"You want me babe? Come and get me." he says with a sly smirk.

Astrid's blood boils and she charges forward. She throws a few missed punches, and after Hadrian lowers after another one, she takes advantage and slams him in the stomach. He grunts and stumbles back. He holds his middle and takes a few deeps breaths.

"Not bad." He says in a rusty tone.

"Glad you enjoyed it." Astrid snaps.

Hadrian smiles, and as if by a snap, his voice was normal. "Now it's my turn!"

He rushes in and punches Astrid left and right, kicks her legs out and kicks her mid-air sending her crashing into the trunk of an oak. Her spine slams into it with a bone-jarring crash. She slides down and slips to the grass. She breathes it off and stands again.

She blinks her eyes and waits until the world settles into focus, but that was a mistake. As she's waiting, she can still see Hadrian charging. But since she sees three at once, she doesn't know where to aim. So all she can do it take the next two hits to the face, then the stomach and finally a hard blow to the neck, cutting off her voice and breathing.

Dropping to her knees, Astrid wheezes and holds her throat. She coughs few times and looks to see Hadrian standing proud and tall. Her blood boils and she still stands, but on weak knees.

"I always knew I made you go, 'weak in the knees'." Hadrian mocks and Astrid grits her teeth.

She runs forward and tries to tag him, but he dodges every one, and when she goes for his face, he moves his hand I front and snatches her fist.

"Good technique." He says. He twists her wrist until he hears the sharp snap. Astrid yelps and Hadrian lifts her, whirls so she's on his back, and spins and sends her flying. She crashes into the sand and slides until she hits a rock cliff with a bump. "Good, but not perfect."

Astrid tries to stand, but only falls to her knees. She holds her

throat again and tries to make use of the air that seems deprived of oxygen. She clenches fistfuls of sand as she hears Hadrian cruel and unforgiving laughter.

"I understand your frustration, Astrid. You hate losing as much as I do. One of the few things we have in common." He says.

"I am nothing like you." she snaps in a rusty tone. Her bangs fall over her eyes she so bent forward.

"You know Astrid, I've always wanted to know. What hurts the most? That I'm free? That I'm practically killed your boyfriend without even trying? That Hiccup probably likes Heather better than you?" he watches as she fists her hands until they're white.

"Shut up." she warns.

"Or is it that deep down inside, you really believed he actually loved you."

Astrid suddenly springs up using her feet, and slams her fist into Hadrian's jaw. He flies backward, flipping and lands on his toes sliding across the sand.

He smiles and adjusts his jaw. "Guess I struck a nerve?"

"You don't know anything about me or him!" she screams in fury.

"You think I don't know myself?" Hadrian says in such a cool voice, Astrid wanted to scream.

"He's nothing like you, and neither are you."

"Oh really?" Hadrian counters. "You don't think he'd be willing to kill me, as I would be willing to him?"

Astrid goes rigid.

"We're a part of each other Astrid, whether you like it or not. And that means," he suddenly rushes to her and wrenches her arm behind her back. Astrid draws in a hiss at the pain. Hadrian leans down and whispers in her ear. "I know all your secrets."

He feels Astrid shudder and sees goosebumps crawl across her arms. She tries to wriggle her way free, but his grip was too strong. "I know everything, Astrid. Remember that."

With his free hand, he chops at her neck from the back. Astrid's body goes limp and Hadrian lets her fall to the sand with a muffled thud.

"Better luck next time, kid." With that he turns and heads for Grandmamma's ship.

Gobber tries to push himself up, but his numb arms slip out from underneath him. He sees the ship sailing out, and he pounds the sand with his fist.

Back by Stoick, they've managed to restore Hiccup's breathing and after making sure his blood level is secure, and Goathi and

Grandmamma let Stoick carry him to Thornado. Gobber and the others break through the bushes with Astrid on his shoulder, and sees Stoick. Hiccup still unconscious in his arms makes everyone on edge.

"Where's Hadrian?" Stoick asks.

"He's gone. And he took Grandmamma's ship." Snotlout says.

Grandmamma and Goathi exchange looks of worry. "We'll gladly take you both back to Berk." Stoick suddenly said.

Astrid moans and Gobber gently sets her down on her feet. "How's Hiccup?" Astrid asks.

"Still hasn't woken up." Grandmamma says. "And I wonder if he ever will."

"He will!" Stoick snaps. "He will. He has to." Stoick rises his feet and mounts Thorndao. "Hadrian got away, so we'll have to worry about him later. Right now, we'll fly back and focus on Hiccup."

Everyone nods and no one disagrees. Goathi rides with Gobber and Snotlout takes Grandmamma. Everyone else mounts their dragons and as they fly off back to Berk, Stoick simply holds Hiccup in his arms, and hopes he's not too late.

Hadrian's boat coasts into Outcast waters and all he can do is smile. He noticed and listened as Outcasts shouted back and forth to ready their forces and alert Alvin.

"Let him come." Hadrian dared.

He watched as soldiers readied at the docks and Alvin and Mildew approached the front. After their fail at controlling Hiccup, they spent their time in jail, but the Vikings simply thought it wouldn't be worth it. They brutally flew Alvin and Mildew back on dragons, just dropping them in mid-air like sacks of flour.

And it was safe to say, Hadrian wasn't back for a warm family reunion.

As the boat stopped and as he laid down the bridge, he could hear Alvin asking questions. The moonlight was shadowed by the clouds so no one could see his face. So Hadrian decided to have fun by throwing another dagger at Alvin. He blocked it, and Hadrian stepped up on the bridge.

Once Alvin and Mildew saw, along with the other soldiers, Hadrian simply smiled.

"Hi-Hadrian?" Alvin says in pure shock.

"Hello father. Miss me?" Hadrian says as he steps down from the bridge. The way he pronounced father made it seem like he had a bitter taste in his mouth. "I've come home."

Alvin, for the first time, was left speechless. How did this happen? How did he get here? What happened to Hiccup?

"Surprised to see me?" He rhetorically asks.

"What, how did you get here?" Alvin asks.

"Took the boat. Long story, and I don't feel like telling it." Hadrian snaps. "But all that matters, is that I'm home."

He steps closer, and the soldiers and Mildew actually step back.

Then, inexplicably, Hadrian lashed out his hand and grabbed Fungus by the head.

"Fungus!" Mildew cried. He tried to stop Hadrian, but he was flung back with a harsh punch in his chest.

Mildew felt as if his feet had been frozen in blocks of ice, he could only stare at the scene of horror unfolding before him, completely helpless.

With a sickening, wet thunk, the dagger slammed into Fungus' chest, burying itself to the hilt. The sheep screamed and fell limp, his body already convulsing. Blood poured from the wound, dark crimson. Hadrian tossed him to the ground unceremoniously and Fungus' legs slapped against the floor, feet kicking aimlessly with onrushing death.

Red spit oozed from between his lips. Mildew felt as if the world were collapsing around him, crushing his heart.

He fell to the ground, pulling Fungus' shaking body into his arms.

"\_Fungus!"\_ he screamed; his voice felt like acid ripping through his throat. "Fungus!"

The sheep shook uncontrollably, blood everywhere, wetting Mildew's hands. Alvin watched in horror, as immobile as his soldiers. Fungus' eyes rolled up in their sockets, dull white orbs. Blood trickled out of his nose and mouth.

"Fungus . . ." Mildew whimpered. The sheep stopped convulsing, stilled. No, he thought. Not Fungus. Anything but Fungus.

Nobody moved, and deep inside, Mildew knew why. Not only were they scared, nothing could help now. It was over.

Fungus' eyes closed, his body went limp. One last breath wheezed from his mouth.

Mildew didn't even get one last chance to stroke Fungus' wool, as Hadrian shamelessly kicked him aside and into the water.

"No!" Mildew shouted, sadness consuming him. He watched as blood oozed and spread out in the water. Contaminating it and spreading like a deadly crimson virus.

Hadrian snatches Mildew's head and tilts it back, the tip of the dagger, still wet with Fungus' blood, gently pinching his Adam's

apple. "And this time, I'm in charge." He bites.

He releases Mildew and walks up the docks. The soldiers immediately make a way, allowing Hadrian a straight path.

"Why?" Mildew cries. Tears stinging his old eyes and his nose fairly congested. "Why?"

Hadrian stops. "Consider it payback for all the lies you fed into my mind." He turns. "And why so upset? You should be grateful. I could've killed you on the spot, just as easily, and just as vicious. But it turns out I actually have a use for you. The sheep, was worthless. You should be grateful."

He then stands horizontally, so he can stare at both the soldiers and Alvin and Mildew. Mildew looks to Alvin with pleading eyes, begging him to do something. Alvin takes a half-step forward. The now large pool of blood in the water out of the corner of his eye.

"Y-you're going to wish you hadn't done that." Alvin says, but his own voice betrayed him. It was shaky. \_What's wrong with me?! He thought.

Hadrian only laughs. "I only wish I'd done it sooner." Then with a leap in the air, he kicks Alvin hard in the chest and sends him skidding and rolling until he stops just at the edge of the dock. "I'm in charge now, Alvin."

He then looks to the Outcasts.

"And if you all swear to serve me, if you follow every command I have to the letter, I will allow you to live. But, if any of you disobey even the smallest request, I will annihilate you without hesitation, and I'll make everyone else watch. If I sense any treason, any weakness, and any hesitation, I will snip it out of you."

He walks through the path made by the soldiers, and he can just feel the fear and power he holds over them. As he reaches the middle, close to the end of the path, he stops, and the soldiers go rigid.

"I know it seems bad now boys, but trust me. You will learn, to like it."

He then walks off into village, leaving a trail of blood in his wake.

## 12. Chapter 11

\*\*~Hey guys, I'm so, so sorry I haven't posted the chapter in a while, it feels like forever! It's been busy, but now I'm back! Hope this chapter's good! Xxx\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>As the fire brews on the pit, Heather dipped a rag into a cold bowl of water and pats Hiccup's head. His breathing returned normal and his pressure stabilized and his pulse was strong; but still not one sign of movement.</p>

After Hadrian sailed out to Thor knows where, Stoick ordered everyone to fall back to Berk to take care of Hiccup. Stoick's been going most of the work, and he almost wouldn't sleep; but seeing as how he had a meeting in the Great Hall today, he gave the duty over to Heather, temporarily. Why he didn't ask Astrid? He needed to her attend the meeting; the same rule applied with Toothless.

Heather patted Hiccup's forehead and sighed. His chest rose and fell in gentle repetitive motions. Despite the circumstances, he looked, peaceful. It was understandable seeing as how he didn't have a goodnight's sleep in what appeared to be a while. As she placed the cloth tentatively on his forehead, she brushed her knuckles against his cheek.

He sighed slightly and shifted a little. At least his senses were coming back, he can feel. And this was definitely a sign of hope for Stoick when he returned. But Heather's hear beat went rapid as she saw Hiccup's eyes flutter, then slowly and drowsily blink open. He turns his head to face Heather as she gasps.

Hiccup groggily smiles. "Hey Heather." He says softly.

Heather stayed there baffled for a moment before she answered. "Hey Hiccup!" she whispered in excitement. She carefully removes the rag from his forehead.

She wanted to leave, but there's a chance he'll fall back asleep and she'll have fetched Stoick for nothing. Besides, he still looks incredibly sleepy; it's most likely he'll fall back asleep any second, really.

"Where am I?" he softly asks.

"Back home, you're safe." She replies.

Hiccup goofily smiles and reaches his hand up. "I've missed you." he says as he caresses her cheek.

Heather slightly blushes before giving doubtable laughing. "Glad to see you're okay." She says as she was about to take his hand off, but as she holds it, his fingers suddenly coil and pull the back of her hand to his cheek.

He smiles again. "I missed you." he repeats. "I missed seeing your face. Always so pretty."

Heather felt her cheeks grow warm, but she tried not to get her feelings racing as he added what sounded like a rather drunken laughter after his words.

"Aw, thank you Hiccup." She replies. "I, missed you too."

"Hey," he suddenly says. He motions a floppy arm motioning her to come closer. "come here."

"What?" Heather asks leaning closer.

"I want to tell you a secret." He whispers, as if to keep it quiet.

"What is it?" she asks hesitantly.

Hiccup places his hand tentatively on her cheek. Then he barely scoots over in his bed and whispers, "I think you're really pretty."

Heather freezes as she tries to process what he just said.

"Like, really pretty." He finishes. "And you're so sweet."

Heather withdraws, her mouth agape. She stares at him as his eyes struggle to stay open. He'll pass out soon. She needed to hear him say it again.

"What, Hiccup?" she asks, and his head rolls to face her. "What did you say?"

"I think you're pretty. Really pretty." He says with a drunken point to her. "And I like you."

Then without giving her another chance to ask, he yawns and suddenly he's out like a candle. His hand drops and his head rolls to the middle of his pillow where his face goes emotionless again. It took the crack of a large log in the fire for Heather to realize, her heartbeat was the loudest thing in the house. Her face was blazing hot and she was slightly shaking, with, excitement.

She tried to reason with herself, he was drowsy, tired, and loopy. There's the highest possibility he won't even remember any of this when he woke up the next time. Heather stood on her wobbly knees and made her way out the door. The cool breeze hit her straight in the face like a splash of cold water. She breathed it in and tried to calm herself.

Did that just happen? She asks herself. And yet as she felt her face, she was smiling so widely. Was it from him waking up? She had calmed herself down and decided it was the logical answer. And now she needed to go tell Stoick; he'll be so happy.

Heather took a deep breath and rushes down the steps and to the Great Hall. She bursts through the door to see Stoick at the head of the fire pit while other intimidating Vikings bordered the outside. Astrid and the others were seated off to the side and it seemed they were in the middle of a conversation when everyone stops and looks to Heather.

"Heather?" Stoick asks. "What is it?"

Heather tried to catch her breath quickly and thanked Thor she ran since now she can blame her flushed cheeks on the exercise. Stoick lifts himself up from hovering over a map of some sort to make his way over to her.

"It's, it's Hiccup!" she squeals. "He woke up!"

Everyone seems to jump at once at her words. "Are you sure?" Stoick asks as he settles the crowd down, including Astrid and the others.

"Yes, it was only for a minute, but he was awake and talking!" she says, and just out of her peripherals, she can see Astrid scowl, upset she wasn't the first face Hiccup didn't see.

And this raises red flags all over Heather's mind.

If Hiccup woke up and saw Astrid, would he have said the same thing to her? The possibility adds on to the fact how drowsy he was, so she adds it to the list.

"Do you know if he'll wake up again soon?" Stoick asks.

"I, I mean it's possible. He did seem like he'd wake again by the end of the day." Heather answers.

Before Stoick could say anything else, Toothless leapt over the pit and rushed out the door. He raced down the steps and busted into the house. He crept up to Hiccup's bedside and saw the young Viking breathing peacefully. He leaned in close and breathed gently on the boy's forehead just as he did the time he was in bed after defeating the Red Death.

He watched as Hiccup's eyes tightened for a brief moment before relaxing. Toothless barks a few times before Hiccup's eyes fluttered open again, this time they were more awake and focused then with Heather. Toothless practically squeals as Hiccup's eyes blink a few times before focusing on the Night Fury before him.

"Hey Toothless." He says in a soft tone. Toothless squeals and leaps on Hiccup's bed licking his face nonstop. "Okay! Okay Toothless, I'm happy to see you too!" Hiccup says with a laugh.

"Hiccup!" he hears someone call. Hiccup looks to the door while he wipes off the dragon saliva on his cheeks. His father was in the doorway along with practically half the village behind him.

"Dad." Hiccup says with a smile and a tone of, relief. His father rushes into the room and gathers his son in his arms, making a quick note to be gentle. Hiccup returns the hug and Stoick can feel the crushing weight of worry lift off his shoulders.

"Thank Thor you're alive." He says.

Everyone else rushes into the room and greets Hiccup with smiles and words of happiness. They gave him gentle pats on the back and warm hugs. Apart from his father, Astrid seemed the most excited and relieved to see Hiccup okay. Hiccup stretched in his bed and pulled aside the covers.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa Hiccup. Not yet." Gobber says as he places his hands over Hiccup's "We need to get Goathi and Grandmamma here to give you a proper check up."

"Gobber, I feel fine." Hiccup assures, but no one will seem to relax until it's done.

So Hiccup decided to please them and let them inform Goathi and Heather's grandmother. Once the two arrived, Grandmamma would not stop pinching and stretching Hiccup's cheeks in delight. They conducted a full check up and Hiccup proceeded to be healthy and

well. Everyone's tensions deflated and yet they were rejoiced.

Hiccup was already up and walking after Goathi and Grandmamma were dismissed. Everyone was dismissed and Hiccup was finally given some peace after they left. He was given some fresh yak milk and two good legs of a fat chicken. He scarfed them down in an instant and he was eager to stretch his legs.

Astrid and the others wanted to come, but Hiccup wanted to go alone. Will all this attention with him sleeping for, according to Stoick, for at least two days. No one has a feeling where Hadrian might be but Hiccup had a pretty good idea. He had managed to walk and fly around the village before meeting everyone in the Great Hall for a celebratory dinner. While things seemed to be at a standstill for a moment, Hiccup still knew this was only the beginning of Hadrian's evil plan. He was going to strike, so Hiccup decides it's best to celebrate now, without any regrets, in case Hadrian strikes soon.

Over on Outcast Island, Hadrian was in the dragon arena, fighting off a Monstrous Nightmare. The Nightmare's blood from scratches leaks out and trickles down his scaly arms and legs. Most of it streams down Hadrian's sword in a grotesque slick of crimson.

He's breathing heavy, and the Nightmare's coughing up blood and saliva, giving its body a deadly shade of crimson. A deep red blaze that mimicked the fires of hell. Hadrian smiled as the dragon struggled to stand up.

"I must admit, I'm disappointed." Hadrian mocks. "They said you were the second best. That only the **BEST** of warriors should challenge you. And yet here you are."

With one last swipe, he struck the dragon down and it collapsed in its own blood. Hadrian smiled and wiped his sword on the dragon's skin. He then sheathed his sword and started walking to the Outcats' Great Hall.

"Sir, if I may ask, why are you battleing the dragons if we are to use them against Berk?" one soldiers asks as he hands Hadrian a towel to wipe off some blood from his face and arms.

"We only need a small amount. If not, we won't need any." And that's all he says as he pushes through the metal door into the volcanic dome.

Back on Berk, Hiccup was sipping from his mug as Gobber and Stoick conversed among the Vikings. He was staring and poking at his portion of a lamb, occupied.

"Thinking?" he hears a voice, and turns to find Astrid.

"You could say that." He replies.

She sits down next to him and rests her elbow on the table. "What's up?"

"Just thinking about Hadrian. And what's he's planning next. Do they know where he went?" he asks.

"Not sure. Why do you?"

"I have a pretty good hunch." Hiccup answers.

"Son!" he hears his father call. Hiccup's head jerks up. "Is everything alright?"

"I just, I just think we should be finding out what it is Hadrian is planning." Hiccup says.

"It's not as easy as it seems, Hiccup." Gobber interjects.

"Well we all know he's sailed out to Outcast Island." Hiccup states.

Everyone goes silent in shock. "How do you know that?" Gobber asks.

"Well, where else would he go? It's the only place he's ever really called home; besides being in my head." Hiccup says.

"What do you think he's planning?" Fishlegs asks as she walks over to Hiccup and Astrid.

"Something big." Hiccup answers. "And all I can say is, we should be getting ready."

Hadrian hovers over a map of Berk while Alvin, Mildew and several other men gather around. Mildew still seemed in pretty bad shape since Fungus' death, and Hadrian can see it. His eyes wander back and forth over the map as more and more men gather.

One soldier cautiously approaches him. "Um, sir?"

"Yes?" Hadrian asks in a cool tone. Never tearing his eyes away from the map.

"So, what exactly is the plan?" the soldier asks.

"We invade Berk, and take over the city. We will dominate it and take it down, by first eliminating our main targets." Hadrian explains.

"How should we form sir?" another soldiers asks.

"You're only going to be there after I take over the village." Hadrian explains.

"What?!" Alvin exclaims. "What do you mean after?! My men have worked hard for this, and they deserve to be part of the action!"

"Well they're not your men anymore, Alvin." Hadrian says. "They're mine, and I'm running this island. And if you have something to say, Don't say it." In an instant, Hadrian pulls out his sword with still some wet blood on it and holds it shoulder level, pointing to Alvin's face. "Or it'll be your last."

Alvin holds up his hands in a defensive motion and backs up.

"You mean, you're going to take down the village singlehandedly?" asks Savage.

Since Hadrian came to Outcast Island, he's been at Hadrian's side like a lost puppy, and a pathetic one at that. Just as he was a kiss-up for Alvin.

"We don't need to strike down every living person there, we only need to take out those who have a chance at a martyr. And that's Stoick, his lackey Gobber, Hiccup and the rest of the kids. If they're gone, then the village is ours."

"Shall we recruit the Beserkers again sir?" Savage asks.

"Too predictable and just another ally who will betray us in the end." Hadrian explains. "We'll deal with them later."

"Hadrian's got to be planning something, and whatever happens in the end, it'll be my fault." Hiccup explains as the Vikings border the fire pit.

"Don't say that Hiccup." Fishlegs says.

"But it's true. And now he's even more dangerous than ever." Hiccup cries.

"So he's learned a few new combat moves, no big deal." Astrid says in an attempt to calm him.

"It is a big deal, Astrid. Hadrian was a part of me. He knows, everything I know." Hiccup says in a shaky voice. "I didn't just give him facts about dragons, or even facts about you. I gave him more. I gave him you. All your flaws, your weaknesses, everything he'd ever need to know."

He feels a hand on his shoulder and looks to see Astrid's gleaming blue eyes, "But it won't matter. When he makes his move, we will be ready."

Hadrian watches as the cool breeze kicks back his tunic and the dirt from his boot. He stands atop the arena, watching as the men ready Trader Johan's ship. They hoist the sail and load flammable charcoal below deck.

"I really must thank you for your ship, Johan. It's the perfect size for storing our cargo."

Hadrian glances back and sees the man struggling to free himself from the chaffing rope tied to his wrists and ankles. His shouts were muffled as the cloth covering his mouth muted it.

"You'll find that quite difficult. The ropes not so easily breakable." Hadrian says.

A soldier runs up and salutes him. "Sir, the boat is ready. And the Cauldron is free in the water."

"Excellent. Load the men." He orders. "It's time to pay a visit."

### 13. Chapter 12

Hiccup watched as Fishlegs and Snotlout collided with a hard clang of their shields. They pushed apart and landing on their feet, they readied again, just as Gobber instructed. Snotlout swung overhead, but Fishlegs ducked and swatted him right in the jaw with the shield. Snotlout was shot into the air for a brief moment before skipping across the asphalt and sliding to a stop just by the water bucket.

Astrid, and Heather cheered Fishlegs on while the twins were divided for rooting for Snotlout. All Hiccup wanted to do was watch. Watch each move that the two Vikings did, thinking Hadrian was bound to do the same ones, but then again Hadrian wasn't a Viking. He arguably wasn't even human.

Hiccup watched and studied the possible moves and techniques he could use against Hadrian. And not having much combat experience, apart from training, even in which he never acquired to, he needed to be ready. For all Hiccup knew, Hadrian's probably fighting at least three dragons at once right now.

Hiccup was so lost in thought, the next time he looked back at Fishlegs and Snotlout, Snotlout's on the floor and Fishlegs is cheering and smiling to the world. Gobber's holding up his hand and smiling and Hiccup watches as he calls him next.

"So, who's my opponent?" Hiccup asks.

Gobber first steps up to Hiccup before answering his questions. Hiccup looks down and in his hands there's a belt and attached to it, a small sword. Hiccup could tell with his many years of weapon designing in the blacksmith's shop, he could tell there was a sword's handle on one end, and on the other, the handle of a small pocket knife; and yet they fit together in the same sheath.

"What's this?" Hiccup asks as Gobber hands it to him.

"It's a special, secret weapon that I designed with the help of your father for modifications to suit you better." Gobber explains.

He then takes the weapon from Hiccup and straps it around his waist. Hiccup wouldn't help but feel a little self conscious as he had a very slim, and frankly feminine, waistline due to his demeanor. But Gobber didn't say anything as he tightened and fidgeted the belt for a comfortable fit. It strapped around his waist and stays hidden under his fur vest. While Hiccup usually kept a knife in his belt, he hasn't been carrying one lately due to the dragons in the village. Once Gobber was finished he steps back.

"Okay, now on you right side, there if you reach back, you'll grab the sword. On your left, the knife. Use them both in the appropriate situation." Gobber explained.

Hiccup let his fingers slide along the surface of the sheath and let his fingers enclose around the handle. He pulls it out and finds the blade at least a foot and a half long, the silver gleaming in the sunlight and Hiccup could hear the metallic echo as he slashed the air, as if hoping to draw blood.

"Now," Gobber starts. "You will learn how to handle these new weapons when in battle. It'll be rough at first, but no better time to start."

Hiccup simply nods as he grips the sword in his hand. "So, who's my opponent?"

"Your opponent, is me." Gobber says.

Hiccup's face is shocked as Gobber interchanges his hook arm for his axe. "Whoa, whoa, what?!" Hiccup stutters as Gobber approaches. "Gobber this isn't fair. You're my friend."

"Hiccup, we all know you have a caring heart. This can be both good and bad at the same time. If Hadrian were to ever pit you against a friend or family member, you need to learn to NOT hold back." Gobber says.

"It's what you taught me if Hadrian ever got released." Astrid chimes in.

Hiccup turns to Astrid and ponders over this before turning to face Gobber. He shields his sword and takes a fighting stance. Astrid gives them the signal to fight and Gobber charges for Hiccup. He runs up and swipes above Hiccup's head, but Hiccup weaves out of the way and sucker punches Gobber in the jaw.

Hiccup then rolls out of the way and comes up on one knee. But as he came up, he got slammed in the face with Gobber's fist. Hiccup skips across the asphalt and slams into the wall of the arena, landing on the ground with a hard thud. He pushes himself up to his hands and knees and takes a deep breath.

"Hiccup!" he hears Astrid cry.

He looks up and sees Gobber charging. He stands and rushes for him, launching himself into Gobber. They roll backwards and Hiccup pushes off of Gobber's chest with his foot. Flipping back, he slides across the ground with his feet and comes to a stop next to the object he eyed before Gobber struck. A Bo staff. Hiccup picks it up and twirls it above his head before standing ready.

Gobber stands up. "Interesting weapon of choice, Hiccup."

"Well, it is one of the few things that I can actually lift." Hiccup snaps.

Gobber can't help but smile at the comment. He charges again and Hiccup ran forward and at the last minute pole vaults over Gobber. But instead of releasing the staff, he grips the end and as his feet touch the ground, he pivots and swings the staff at Gobber's back, slamming it with a thwack. The echo of the hit waved through the arena and Gobber went flying across the ground, bouncing a few times before hitting the wall.

He pushes himself up and looks to Hiccup, spitting to the side of him and cracking his neck. Hiccup smirks and spins the staff again as a way to show off. "Hm, I've taught you well."

"I learn from the best." Hiccup replies.

Hiccup readies the staff and rushes for Gobber. Gobber stands like a yak and as Hiccup drew close, and as Hiccup swings, Gobber grabs the staff with his free hand and tries to slice at Hiccup with the axe hand. Hiccup pushes off of his feet and spins to the top of the staff before Gobber realizes. Gobber's still pondering over where Hiccup went until he looks at the top of the staff.

Hiccup's crouching down, the toes of one foot on the top of the staff while his prostatic one simply rests the side for support, like a monkey. Hiccup has a smug look on his face as he leans back, throwing his weight and momentum along with it, and leaps off. The staff swings back and slaps Gobber in his face, straight at the nose. Hiccup lands on his feet as Gobber grunts from the pain.

"Alright Hiccup!" Fishlegs cheers.

Hiccup smiles and as he turns, Gobber's already too close, and Hiccup gets a hard knock to the jaw. He's sent flipping backwards into the wall. He slides down after the hard smack, and puts his hand to his head, moaning from the pain and the sudden tilt the world takes. He shakes his head, grits his teeth and stands.

"Man, Hiccup's tougher than I thought." Tuffnut says.

"Yeah, he can like, totally kick butt." Ruffnut adds.

Astrid couldn't help but smile as she watched Hiccup while listening to the young Vikings' words. "Of course, he's never faced me before." Snotlout gloats.

He obviously must've seen Astrid's face while looking to Hiccup, and now feels he has competition. For some reason, he couldn't take a hint.

"I mean, I always was the better fighter of the family." He adds, leaning close to Astrid.

She simply leans away and snarls. "Not anymore." She slices into his ego. Then simply resumes watching Hiccup and Gobber, not even sparing Snotlout a look.

Hiccup had just swung at Gobber, but Gobber snatched the staff, punched Hiccup back and snapped the staff in half with his knee. Hiccup's back hits the asphalt and he flips and comes up sliding on one knee. He looks up to see Gobber charging, but at the last minute, he stabs one half of the broken staff into a random crack in the asphalt, and flicks it up, sending a cloud of dirt and small rocks scattering into Hiccup's eyes.

He coughs a few times and says, "Can't see."

Hiccup could hear Gobber talking through the darkness. He listens as he tries to find his location.

"Now, it would seem that I have an advantage. You can't only just rely on one sense to help you. But according to facts, lucky for you, if one sense is eliminated, the others get stronger." Gobber explains. "Look beyond what you see. You cannot trust your eyes. If

you only see what's right in front of you, then you will lose."

Hiccup rotates in a circle as he tries to use Gobber's advice. Now he's regretting he didn't pay attention to the hunting advice Stoick gave him when they went out together. Suddenly a flash hits him when he looks at Toothless. The dragon has an unparalleled sense of hearing. How else could he have heard Hiccup from the arena all the way back in the village; back when killing dragons was around? He listens closely and feels the minerals beneath his toes.

Suddenly, Hiccup hears Gobber's heavy footsteps behind him. He spins and clamps the rusty metal pole of a spear Gobber must've grabbed. He feels Gobber yank it from his hands and Hiccup listens closely as he hears the shift in the air currents. Gobber pokes and stabs at Hiccup, missing each one.

Still with his eyes squeezed shut, Hiccup hops on it, balancing on his toes and prostatic foot. In an instant, he rolls forward on the staff and slams his feet right in Gobber's diaphragm. He hears a synchronized clang of Gobber and the spear; he must still be holding it. Hiccup tries to clear his eyes, and while his vision is blurred, better than stumbling around in the dark.

He can just make out Gobber silhouette as he rushes forward. Hiccup runs and leaps into the air. Gobber blocks his chest with the spear, but Hiccup rolls in midair and with force, pushes the spear down, ultimately winding Gobber. Pushing off, he lands on his feet and takes the opportunity to fix his eyes while he hears Gobber wheezing.

He blinks his eyes and manages to get his vision to refocus. He readies his hands in fists and suddenly gets a stinging pain. He looks and finds some of his knuckles have cuts due to his punches to Gobber. While Gobber is still trying to regain his breath, Hiccup intensely rips off the sleeves of his shirt and wraps them around his hands and knuckles.

While he didn't take notice, Astrid, Ruffnut and even Heather are all on different levels of blushing as Hiccup's arm have really toned and shaped. What once mimicked sticks on a, stick, now they looks like actually Viking arms, and fit ones instead of having that, thickness to them.

Hiccup charges and leaps and slams his foot into Gobber's ribcage. Gobber flies back, the heels of his feet still dragging across the ground and his back slamming into the wall of the arena. Before he has time to react, Hiccup had snatched another spear and plants one tip on the ground, mimicking a pole vault, but instead swung around the pole in a circle, and coming back around his feet knock into Gobber's head, sending him sprawling in the dirt, and nearly unconscious. The loud boom that was made when Hiccup feet made contact with Gobber sounded severely bone-jarring.

Hiccup lands on his feet a few inches away from Gobber, and was surprised to not see Gobber moving for a moment. He breathed a sigh of relief as he Gobber got up from lying on the hard ground. It seemed to be a struggle, but Hiccup thought Gobber would be fine against a ninety pound boy. Then again, Hiccup took a good few punches and here he stands. Hiccup only truly felt relieved once

Gobber had made it to his feet without a wobble or fumble.

Gobber cracks his neck, and as if that did the trick, Gobber smiles like he always does and laughs. "Well, looks like I did teach you a few things. Well done Hiccup. Good use of recourses, senses and strength."

"Are you okay?" Hiccup asks.

"I'm fine. You're a lot stronger than you look." Gobber says. "In fact, it's great to know you have some Viking in you after all." Gobber comments and Hiccup smiles.

"Looks like I don't need Hadrian to be tough." Hiccup says smiling.

Gobber places a hand on Hiccup's shoulder. "You've done well."

And after sharing hug with Gobber, he goes and joins the teens. They're cheering and praising Hiccup and following him out with smiles and laughs.

Later that nightfall, Trader Johan's ship pulls into Berk's water. But they shelter behind a large in water boulder. The soldiers help Hadrian's gear and weapons, and over to the side, they see the Scauldron swimming in circles, awaiting an order. The men help Hadrian strap on his sheath of arrows, his whip, a sword, and a knife strapped to his thighs. The Scauldron raises its head above the water and roars.

"Easy boy, I'm coming." Hadrian says with a smile.

"I still can't believe how you managed to train the dragons with ease." Alvin says as he walks up. Mildew not far behind him.

"Jealous, Alvin?" Hadrian smirks, and in turn Alvin scowled.

"Alright sir, we're ready." Says on soldier helping with his gear.

"Excellent. Ready the men on the far side of the island, you'll all come in at once when I give the signal." Hadrian orders.

"What's the signal?" Mildew asks.

"You'll know it." Hadrian grimly smiles.

Then without another word, he hops up on the plank and walks out to the very edge before he does a perfect dive into the water. His head breaks the surface and the Scauldron swims over to him before circling and then diving deeper. Hadrian grabs the dragon's dorsal fin and lets the dragon dive and cannon through the water, almost similar to flying.

Hadrian can see the shoreline of Berk, then behind it an endless covering of trees. He smiles as the dragon approaches the edge of the water where Hadrian's feet can just touch the ground.

He slowly rises out of water; head first, then his body. Once above water, Hadrian's on the Scaulron's head and the dragon sets him down, and Hadrian steps foot on the sand. He looks to the sky and takes a deep breath.

"Feels good to be back on the shores of Berk."

Then after signaling the dragon to submerge, he turns and faces the trees.

He smiles, and after reaching the edge, he practically vanishes into the shadows.

#### 14. Chapter 13

Hiccup draped his fur vest over the back of his desk chair as he readied himself for bed. He unwraps his sleeves from his hands and strips off the tunic before walking back downstairs and feeding it to the fire. Back upstairs, he manages to find another similar tunic and lays it out at the foot of his bed.

Toothless hops up on his stone bed and blasts the rock with his fire before circling and settling down. He purrs as Hiccup scratches behind his ears. Hiccup laughed as Toothless nearly flopped off the bed as Hiccup made his way back to his bed.

"Goodnight bud." Hiccup says, and he hears Toothless coo in reply. "Today was a pretty good day. And you know, I'm starting to feel good about this whole, Hadrian thing. Maybe I can take him down." Toothless coos again and Hiccup blows out the candle on his nightstand and snuggles beneath the covers.

Out in the woods, the soft patter of footsteps quietly echoes through the trees. Hadrian runs through the forest in a direct beeline for the village. He'd forgotten what real trees look like. With the pathetic skeletal remains of his old "home", he had forgotten that trees are really brown, and that they're usually covered with green leaves. The ground is a mixture of brown and green, and it feels rejuvenating to feel rocks and leaves instead of ash.

He leaps up and lands on the branch of an oak and squinting his eyes, can see the lights of the village and a few mobile ones. No doubt guards scouting the village. Hadrian leaps off and sneaks off around to the next house as a nearby guard was walking near it. He ducks into the nearest alley and flattens himself against the slick brick wall.

He sees the faint outline of the guards shadow come closer. Hadrian stalks his way closer to the front, but just out of sight of the light. Hadrian flattens against the wall, then just as the guard passes him, Hadrian whips off his bow and springs from the alley.

He slips the bow around the Viking's neck and already the man's struggling. Hadrian lines up the handle of the bow at the center of the Viking's neck. The Viking makes a few gasping and choking sounds, then Hadrian forces him down to his knees. He then places his knee at the center of the back, and with a hard yank up and to the right, Hadrian heard the sharp, merciless and rewarding snap.

The Viking goes limp in his arms and Hadrian drags him into the alley. Then after looting his body, peaks his head out from the alley. No one had seen him, and there were still a couple left. Probably thought the man went in for the night. Hadrian smiled as he traveled through the village in the shadows.

As he approaches Hiccup's house, he can see the lights are out. They all must be asleep. Hadrian sees another alley and ducks in again. He slightly steps out and peeks through the shadows, half his face concealed. Another guard is walking on the opposite side of the road. Hadrian smiles as he loads an arrow into his bow, he pulls and aims, but pauses when the guard stops to talk to another.

He can hear how the guards are talking about the missing one he took down. He debates on what to do. He can shoot both down, or he can go while they're distracted. Keep moving it is. He slips from the alley and rushes for the house next to the Great Hall. He leaps and rolls to the side of the house and flattening his back against the wall. Peeking around the corner, he can see Hiccup's house in sight.

Looking up to the roof of the house, he wall scrambles up and stands on the banister slicing across the roof. He walks to the edge and can see a good jumping distance from Hiccup's house.

"Time for a visit." He whispers.

Hadrian steps back and then runs across, powerfully leaping, flipping forward, and landing on Hiccup's roof with no sound louder than a tip.

He crawls and grips the banister and walks his way across the roof until he reaches the skylight directly over Hiccup's room. Hadrian walks around it until he settles in a corner lining parallel to Hiccup's bed. He leans his head in, and peeks over to Toothless. The dragon's head in resting on his paws and eyes closed.

Hadrian smiles. He looks over to Hiccup and the boy's resting on his arm as he lays on his side. Even with the shadow of the skylight obscuring his face, Hadrian can see the outline and that's all he needed to find his target. Hadrian reaches back and pulls an arrow from his sheath and loads it into the bow.

Pulling the string back, he smiles and whispers. "So long, Dragon Conqueror."

Suddenly, Toothless body began to shiver. His ears perk and twitch back and forth. Something wasn't right. He snaps his head up and looks around the room, then his eyes look to see Hadrian with his loaded arrow

Toothless' eyes shrink to slits and he springs up and releases a blood-curdling scream that ultimately startles Hiccup awake. Hiccup jerks in his bed and first looks to Toothless then up where he's screaming. Hiccup jumps as an arrow embedded itself in his pillow. Barely missing his head.

Hiccup springs up from his bed as Hadrian leaps down in through the skylight and crashing into his bed; smashing it to pieces. Hadrian rises and dusts off his shoulders. "Hey Hiccup. Miss me?"

In an instant he flicks his wrist and sends five daggers flying at Hiccup. "Look out!" Hiccup screams as he and Toothless dodge in opposite directions.

Hiccup ended up rolling near the edge of his room, and as he turns to roll over, Hadrian suddenly lands on him, straddling his hips. Hadrian immediately whips out a dagger and flips the blade. He tries to stab at Hiccup's face, but Hiccup was still able to move his head and as Hadrian aims for the heart, Hiccup manages to stop him, but his hand was still slowly coming down. He was stronger than Hiccup remembered, but so was he. By now, he'd be dead.

Toothless suddenly, crashes into Hadrian, knocking him off and pinning him to the ground. Toothless roars and the two wrestle rolling and Toothless frantically flapping his wings. Hiccup pushes to his feet.

"Toothless be careful!" Hiccup cries as he inches closer.  
"Toothle-"

Hiccup was cut short as Toothless' wing smacks him in the face and sending his sprawling at the edge of Toothless' bed. Toothless is momentarily distracted and Hadrian takes advantage. He stabs the blade of his knife into Toothless' side, just behind his front right leg.

"Toothless!" Hiccup screams.

Hadrian kicks Toothless off after removing his knife, and scrambles for Hiccup. Hiccup manages to snatch his belt weapon before Hadrian tackles him and the two toppled over the edge of the room and crashing into the table on the floor level. Hiccup grips Hadrian's wrists to prevent his hands from reaching his throat.

Hiccup then head-butts Hadrian and kicks him off and Hadrian rolls and comes up on one knee. Hiccup pushes himself up and straps the belt to his waist. Hiccup draws his knife and flips the blade.

Hadrian raises an eyebrow. "Well, you're full of surprises. New toy?"

"Something special from my friends." Hiccup snaps.

Hadrian runs forward, but suddenly is slammed in the side, and sent skipping across the floor and into the front wall. Momentarily unconscious. Hiccup looks and finds his Dad standing, breathing smoke he was so furious. Toothless leaps down and rushes to Hiccup's aid. He snuggles and purrs and Hiccup grants him with pets.

"Hiccup what happened?!" His father asks.

"Hadrian! He, he came out of nowhere and nearly shot me in the head. I woke up to Toothless screaming and the next thing I know, I nearly got shot in the head with an arrow."

"Well, Toothless has good instincts." Stoick says.

Suddenly a dagger whizzes by Hiccup's head and slits off the ends of his bangs. Hiccup looks to see Hadrian block a punch from his Dad and

knee him in the stomach before grabbing and twisting his wrist and hurling him over, crashing into the corner of the house.

"Dad!" Hiccup cried.

Suddenly Hiccup was tackled again and this time they burst through the front door and bounce and roll back and Hadrian kicks Hiccup off and he crashes into a wooden wheelbarrow, shattering it and sending barrel's rolling. Hiccup stops one and kicks it toward Hadrian. Hadrian leaps over it and shoots an arrow at Hiccup.

Hiccup swerves out of the way and runs toward him, but Hadrian snatches his wrist and twists it behind Hiccup's back. Hiccup hisses in pain. "Bet you think you're pretty slick."

Then Hiccup snarls, unbends his wrist and spins and twirls Hadrian, slamming his foot in Hadrian's chest. "I have my moments."

Hadrian windmills under Hiccup, and Hiccup simultaneously back handsprings a foot away. Hadrian whips out two knives and runs toward Hiccup. Hiccup reaches back for his own, but had to dodge the oncoming stabs. After Hiccup had scrambled away, he reaches back and pulls out his knife. He aims for Hadrian's head, and when he misses, Hiccup whirls in a circle, and kicks Hadrian back by aiming at the stomach.

Hadrian bounces back and he pushes off his toes as he slides, and rushes Hiccup. They par and their weapons heavily clang together. Hiccup goes for a slice on the face, but Hadrian blocks by making an X with his daggers. Hiccup pushes first, then Hadrian pushes back. Evenly matched.

"You've gotten stronger since I last saw you." Hadrian comments.

"Lean in a little closer and I'll show you how strong I've really gotten." Hiccup retorts. Then he pushes down the weapons and head-butts Hadrian again, sending him somersaulting back.

Hadrian comes up on one knee and readies a dagger. But before he could fling them, a spine shoots from behind knocking the weapon out of his hand. Hadrian snarls and grips his wrist. Both boys look up and see Stormfly.

"Astrid!" Hiccup realizes.

"Hiccup! Are you okay?!" She calls.

"Be careful!" Hiccup warns.

Hadrian looks back and sends three dagger flying and as Astrid flies out of the way, he runs for Hiccup, but suddenly, Meatlug lands in front of him and Hadrian slides to a stop. She roars and barfs up a lava rock sending Hadrian scrambling. He skips backwards and lands on his stomach. Hiccup pushes past Fishlegs without even a thank you and goes after Hadrian. But Hadrian pushes himself up and sees Hiccup. Hiccup pauses, and waits for him to rise. Hadrian does, but he only smirks and walks backwards, and disappears into the shadows.

"Hey get back here!" Hiccup shouts. He runs for the dark, but only

comes to find foliage and bushes. Hiccup swipes at the greens and angrily grunts.

From inside the woods, Hiccup could hear Hadrian's maniacal laughter. "You want me boy? Come and get me." he mocks.

"Uh, am I the only one who smells a trap?" Fishlegs comments.

Hiccup turns back around and walks toward the teens. "We'll need to take him from above. The boy's no match for a Night Fury." Hiccup commands. He then turns to Fishlegs. "Thanks."

He mounts Toothless, and sees that his leg is clean. He looks to his father. "I've managed to stop the bleeding. I told him to stay, but he's pushing through." Stoick explains. His father mounts Thornado alongside his left. Astrid backs up Stormfly on Hiccup's right. Then with one flap of Toothless' wings, the group was off in the air. Hiccup uses his spyglass to look through the trees and bushes. The moonlight casted its iris curtain along the woods. The shadows obscured the look of the forest, giving it more detail look. Perfect. No wonder Hadrian always adored the night.

Looking left and right, Hiccup began to think they'd lost him. He was about to call everyone back, when suddenly, he saw a figure move. "Down there!"

Hiccup and Toothless swoop down and hover over Hadrian. Hadrian pretends to not notice them and at the last minute, he swipes his wrist through the air and sends four daggers zipping. Hiccup weaves out of the way and dives Toothless down. Hiccup had grabbed a bow from his father before they departed the house.

With the sheath on his waist, Hiccup pulls an arrow and aims at Hadrian's shoulder blade. "You're not the only one who can shoot an arrow." Hiccup snarls.

He releases the string, and Hadrian had rolled out of the way. In turn, he shot his own arrow and Toothless spun out of the way.

"Where's he going?" Astrid calls.

"I don't know, but we need to be ready." Hiccup informs and as he says this, the blanket of trees comes to a halt and they're now overlooking the Cliffside where the Typhoomerang's flower bed grows.

And right at the center of the burn is Hadrian. Arms folded, smirk on his face. Hiccup knew something was about to happen, but he had backup and dragons. Hiccup swoops down and leaps off of Toothless before landing in the flowerbed. Hiccup rises and grip his bow.

"You know, for a little runt, you sure can cause an awful lot of trouble." Hadrian says.

"You're really not the first person to say that." Hiccup says, gritting his teeth at being called a runt.

Hadrian snickers while he slowly walks around Hiccup; Hiccup turning to keep his eyes on him. Meanwhile over in the bushes, Stoick and the

others landed just in sight for Hadrian to see. In a way, they do have the upper advantage. If Hadrian did go with the Outcasts, as far as everyone knows, they still haven't been able to control their dragons. And since Hadrian's not the nicest kind of guy, their chances were pretty good.

"But, no matter what you do, Dragon Conqueror or not, you're still as naive and predictable." Hadrian suddenly comments. "Now!"

Suddenly, a wave of arrows erupts from the tree line. "Take cover!" Stoick shouts.

But Toothless comes up behind Hiccup and with a plasma blast, eliminates most of the arrows. Then Stormfly's fire exterminates the rest. Hiccup draws an arrow and readies his bow.

"You're going to have to do better than that!" Hiccup mocks.

"I did"

Then slowly, Outcast soldiers materialize from the trees and shadows, all armed to the teeth. Wielding axes, swords, spears, horned shields.

Hiccup pulls out an arrow and shouts. "Ambush!"

Hiccup immediately shoots an arrow at Hadrian, knowing Hadrian would dodge, it then ricochets off the Outcast's helmet, rendering him unconscious. The Outcasts charged, but Stoick and the others barged in and started paring with them. Hiccup goes for Hadrian, and Hiccup prepares as he draws a sword. Hiccup slings his bow over his shoulder and grabs his sword. The two slam with a heavy metallic clang and the sharp scraping of the swords and Hiccup and Hadrian struggle against one another. They thrust apart and Hadrian skillfully exchanges between hands, spinning for effect, before running and slicing for Hiccup's head. Hiccup weaves low and slices his Achilles tendon before rolling out of the way.

Hadrian's leg weakens, but he doesn't fall to his knees. Instead, he pushes up and bends his knee to get used to the pain. He smirks and runs as if it's not injured at all. Hiccup dodges his first swing at the head, and blocks one aiming for his stomach. He swings the sword behind his head and hears another clang before pushing off, spinning and kicking Hadrian's feet out from under him. Hadrian flips in mid air and spins low and slices at Hiccup prostatic foot. The sword gets jammed in the wood and Hiccup uses his muscle to lift his other leg and slam it into Hadrian's face.

He falls back, losing his grip on the sword and rolling until he's flat on his stomach. Hiccup grips the sword and pulls. It takes a good couple yanks until the words free. Hiccup pats his foot on the ground, testing if it can hold his weight, and it seems fine. Hiccup looks up and in an instant, Hadrian flies at him, snatching back his sword. Hiccup grunts in pain as Hadrian had twisted his arm back to loosen his grip. Hadrian rolls forward and smiles.

Making a beeline for Hiccup, he leaps at the last minute slashes above head, and Hiccup blocks, and Hadrian lands behind him. Hiccup turns to see him smiling. "Come along little man." Hadrian says.

Then once again, steps back into the foliage. Hiccup was about to follow before a battle cry caught his attention. He turns to see Stoick and the others fighting off Outcasts. Hiccup looks back at the foliage and shakes his head. He loads an arrow and nails an oncoming Outcast heading straight for Astrid. She looks at him then Hiccup just as he was running, leapt and slamming his bow onto the Outcast's head. He falls to the ground and Astrid looks to the Outcast, then Hiccup before giving him a thumbs up.

"Hiccup!" his father calls after punching an Outcast. "Where's Hadrian?"

"He vanished further into the woods." Hiccup tells as he swipes at an Outcast coming from behind, slashing across his face.

"Go!" His father says. Hiccup looks to him in confusion. "We'll hold them off. Go get Hadrian!" Stoick tells him as he blocks an oncoming axe.

Hiccup nods and shields his sword. He hops aboard Toothless and the two fly off into the next section of woods. They fly low and scan the land. They can't see much, when out of nowhere, an arrow flies and grazes against Toothless' saddle.

"Whoa! Down there bud." Hiccup points and the two dive down and land in a clearing.

Hiccup hops off and looks around. Nothing. Hiccup takes a few steps forward and listens. The woods were silent. Even the birds and crickets had ended their nightly song. A flash of lightning startles them both, and then rain drop tickle Hiccup's skin and wets his hair as he looks around.

"Something's not right." Hiccup says. "Where are you Hadrian?! What's a matter?! Afraid of a dragon and a ninety pound runt?!"

Dry lightning cracks across the skies, and crash of thunder emphasizes Hiccup's blooming rage. The storm clouds gathering in his eyes.

Suddenly Hadrian's laughter echoed through the trees. "Patience Hiccup. I'll deal with you soon, but right now, you have other things to worry about."

As if on cue, a wolf's howl radiated through the trees. Hiccup's skin started crawling with goose skin, sending a shiver through his shoulder and down his spine. Hiccup listens closely, past the sound of the downpour, through the wind kicking up moisture. Hiccup looks around and takes a step forward.

Suddenly, a bear trap encloses around his prostatic leg. Hiccup loses his balance and falls to the ground on his back. He pushes himself to a sitting position and looks at the trap. He kept thanking the gods that it was just his fake leg.

"Aw man." He says as he tries to pry the trap loose. Toothless circles around him and cries in worry. "I'm fine, bud. I'm fine. Thank Thor it was just the fake one."

Hiccup continues to pry the trap loose, but the thing had snapped tight. And as Hiccup was about to call Toothless to blast it, the wolves' howls echo again in the distance. Hiccup goes rigid. He slowly peers up ahead into the trees and bushes. Toothless suddenly shifts into defensive mode and walks to stand over Hiccup. Through the shower of rain, Hiccup could see paws run through the bushes. Hiccup's breathing quickens as a wolf snarls nearby. Hiccup pulls his bow forward and readies an arrow; his gaze shifting back and forth.

Suddenly a wolf springs from the bushes on Hiccup's left, teeth bared in hatred as it aims for him. Hiccup shoots it in the skull and it topples past him and Toothless. More howls emanate and Hiccup's breathing quickens. His heartbeat threatening to break his rib cage. Fissure-like lightning travel's through the sky and briefly illuminates the clearing. A second wolf bolts out of the middle of the bushes, its mouth already open and ready to attack Hiccup. He shoots his arrow and it embeds itself in the wolf's throat and it too topples and crashes to Hiccup's side.

Snarls and growls were head behind them now, and Toothless turns and grimaces. Toothless roars through the woods, and three wolves emerged from their hiding places, licking their lips and snarling in anger. Toothless snarls back.

A wolf from before, suddenly filled with courage, dived for Toothless and stated to maul his tail. "Toothless!" Hiccup cries, and as another wolf aims for Hiccup, he shoots it the mouth and Toothless simultaneously blasts the trio of wolves and they fly back and scatter once they hit ground. Once Toothless had reached back, he grabbed the wolf by the scruff on his back and shook it back and forth before chucking it into a tree. With a final snarl, the wolf darted back into the woods.

Slowly as Hiccup awaited another wolf, Toothless growls and inches away from Hiccup to scout for more in the foliage. Hiccup looks and hears the bushes fall silent. He then takes his chance and tries once again to pry the trap loose. He puts down his bow and tries to pry the rustic metal apart. Suddenly, Hiccup hears a growl and the minute his eyes drift up, a wolf tackles him.

"Agh! Get . . . the hell . . . off me!" Hiccup cries as the wolf bites at his trapped foot.

Hiccup flips to his side and kicks the wolf in the snout, knocking it off his foot, but it snarls and instantly leaps on top of Hiccup; snarling and growling as it tries to bite down on his face and neck. Hiccup blocks with one arm while he reaches behind and grabs his knife. He then stabs the wolf in its shoulder, just at his front right leg. It backs off, whines for a brief moment before leaping again. Hiccup continually stabs it anywhere he can land the blade. Its blood splatters and sprinkles itself all over Hiccup's leg, arms and partially his face.

Until finally, as the wolf goes in for the final death bite, Hiccup brings the blade in front of him, and the blade embeds itself all the way to the hilt into the wolf's chest. Its body go limp, its head falling on Hiccup's shoulder. Hiccup hysterically breathes as he rolls over and quickly pushes off the wolf. It heavily rolls off, its mouth still open, and eyes still feral. Hiccup tries to calm his

breathing as Toothless rushes over, grabbing the wolf by the tail and flinging it into the bushes.

Hiccup starts to frantically rip the trap apart, eager to get away and find Hadrian. "Toothless!" he calls, his voice cracking as he's still trying to get over the initial shock.

Toothless comes over and blasts at the trap and it snaps and loosens. It still needed a little prying, but it was much easier and Hiccup was finally able to pull his foot out. Thankfully it wasn't broken, but there were holes in the wood. Hiccup gets help from Toothless to stand and tries to see if it can still hold. A little wobbly, but it can still do the job.

Hiccup continues on through the woods, "Figures Hadrian would lead us right to a wolf hunting ground." Hiccup snarls as they travel further. He looks to Toothless tail. "Sorry about your tail bud."

Toothless coos in reply and nuzzles Hiccup's hand.

They wander out of the clearing and into the woods, looking in all directions, more alert. Meanwhile, Stoick and the others had just finished defeating the rest of the Outcast soldiers, and ready to meet up with Hiccup.

"Alright, that should do it." Gobber says. "Now, let's meet up with Hiccup and see if he's had any luck."

Stoick mounts Thornado while the other kids hop on their dragons. "I'm hoping he didn't have any." Stoick admits as the dragons ascended.

Hiccup had stopped at a small outcropping near the riverside to check his foot. It still seemed in pretty good shape, and the storm lightened up; now it was all just a simply drizzle, soon to be clear. Hiccup took the chance to ring out his clothes and Toothless took a drink from the river.

He looks to Toothless' tail and sees it ripped and chewed and filled with so many holes it mimics Swiss cheese. As Toothless was drinking, his ear began to twitch. His head suddenly rises and Hiccup looks to see that familiar look in his eyes. The look he had when they found the dragon's nest a couple years before.

Toothless starts looking around. "Toothless?"

Toothless crouches down and snarls across the river. Hiccup takes his bow and readies it. Hadrian's laughter radiates from the trees. Hiccup turns in a circle, desperate to find the origin. A muted lightning bolt flashes in the sky. Hiccup turns and spots Hadrian bolting from the trees.

"Hey!" Hiccup calls and he chases after him. Not even bothering to mount Toothless.

Hiccup had to put his coordination to the test as he was divided between chasing Hadrian while avoiding any sudden trees, branches and twigs that come out of nowhere, whipping him in the face and cutting his cheeks. Hiccup locked on the back of Hadrian's head as he was

close on his tail. He could feel Toothless not far behind him. He follows Hadrian and the two come to a sudden drop, and Hiccup jumps, a little shaky on the landing, but pushes forward to keep up with Hadrian. He watches Hadrian break through some bushes and Hiccup rushes and pushes through and comes skidding to a stop.

There he and Hadrian both stood. Out of breath, and gazing at each other. Drenched in rain, bruised, and splattered with blood. A smile still stretched across Hadrian's face.

They're both silent. The rain had stopped, and it seems the world has as well. They now stand on a ridge in the cliffside, overlooking the sea of Berk. Fog from the rain and humidity now clods and blankets the bottom below. Hiccup shudders at the memory it brings back.

"You're not bad." Hadrian says, breaking the silence. "For a kid."

"If I can kill wolves, I can kill you too." Hiccup snaps.

"I'm not done with you yet, Hiccup. Or any of your friends."

"You're not going to lay a finger on them." Hiccup says. "Over my dead body."

"That, can be arranged." Hadrian says as he draws his sword.

Outcast men emerged from the overhead cliffs and laughed and mocked Hiccup. Toothless snarls and inches forward, Hiccup stops him by extending his arm out to his side. Toothless still snarls, but steps back.

A dragon knows when it isn't his fight.

Hiccup draws his own sword, and he keeps a steady grip. Hadrian smiles and is the first to run and leap for Hiccup.

"One on one?" Hiccup challenges.

"If you think you can handle it." Hadrian retorts.

Thornado and the other dragons fly overhead, scanning the forest left and right. "Any sign?!" Astrid calls.

"Nothing yet!" Stoick replies.

"Wait, Stoick! Down there!" Gobber points to the clearing littered with the dead bodies of the wolves.

"What happened?" Astrid whispers as they land.

Gobber traces his fingers along the wound of the wolf next to the bear trap. "They came across here. Hiccup must've gotten stuck. That's when the wolves attacked. But it looks like they won."

"We need to find Hiccup!" Astrid pleads.

"Dragons everyone!" Stoick commands, and they mount and take off in an instant.

Hiccup had just swiped and crescent kicks Hadrian in the temple. Hadrian spins and launches his fist into Hiccup's stomach. Hiccup drops to his knees and tries to inhale, and Hadrian kicks him further down near the wall of the cliff. Hiccup pushes to his hands and knees, and as Hadrian comes charging with his sword, Hiccup springs up and Butterfly spins out of the way. Hadrian's sword stabs into the wall and Hiccup rushes to get his sword.

Hadrian yanks his blade free and chuck it to Hiccup. It sticks into the ground, nearly missing Hiccup as he slides to a stop. Hiccup looks behind and Hadrian punches Hiccup in the stomach again and while Hiccup's doubled over, Hadrian punches him in the back, sending Hiccup tumble rolling forward. As Hiccup's momentum carries him forward, he manages to reach his hands out in front of him and stop himself from hitting wall as his feet found the ground. But Hadrian knees him in the ribs, sending him slamming into a stalagmite in the ground of the ridge.

As Hadrian runs to him, Hiccup Tornado kicks him in the jaw, but Hadrian whirls and goes for another punch. Hiccup jumps on top of the stalagmite and pushes off, slipping back. His feet find the side of the cliff and he pushes off beaming for Hadrian. But as he comes in, Hadrian lifts his foot, and instead of kicking Hiccup in the stomach, he uses Hiccup momentum to catch and swing him down, so his foot slams into Hiccup's chest. Hadrian picks up Hiccup by the collar of his tunic, and forcefully tosses him to the wall of the cliff. Hiccup remains curled up on his side as Hadrian approaches.

Hiccup was breathing fairly heavy, and his body aches all over. His muscles complain and his bones ache. Even mind over matter couldn't help him. While Hadrian received damage, Hiccup was growing weaker. His pain tolerance at its limit.

"You always knew it was going to end this way." Hadrian mocks.

Hiccup coughs. "No." he whispers in a raspy tone.

Hiccup then turns and claws at Hadrian with his nails. Not a very effective weapon, but better than none at all. Then Hiccup takes advantage and punches Hadrian repeatedly left and right until they were near the edge of the ridge. Hadrian blocks the next punch and nails Hiccup in the cheek. Hiccup skips back and quickly pushes to stand. Hadrian's coming for him, sword in hand and Hiccup rushes toward the wall before flipping into a gainer, and Hadrian's sword just missing his foot. Hiccup lands on the blade and sucker punches Hadrian left and right two more times before Hadrian goes for him. Hiccup, already ahead, drops gripping the blade of the sword and swinging out sending Hadrian sliding across the dirt.

Hiccup jumps down and yanks Hadrian's sword free.

"Hiccup!" Someone suddenly called. Both boys turn to see Stoick and the other's land their dragons. "Hiccup!" Stoick calls again.

They were about to run and defend him, but the Outcasts soldiers arm their crossbows, ready to fire.

"Stay back!" Hiccup yells.

"And watch me finished your son, Stoick!" Hadrian adds.

Hiccup readies and blocks his oncoming punches but Hadrian knees him again in the stomach and Hiccup, already out of breath, nearly collapses. He catches himself on his hands and knees and Hadrian kicks him closer to the edge of the ridge.

"Hiccup!" Stoick shouts.

Hadrian turns back and smirks and places his foot on Hiccup's side. Stoick suddenly screams at the top of his lungs and charges forward. Hadrian quickly turns and powerfully pushes off his feet and flipping back, landing on one of the other ridges with an Outcast solider.

Hiccup's body seemed to roll on its own weight and Hiccup drowsily rolls off, barely conscious. His eyes and mind foggy. Stoick runs and jumps off the cliff, nabbing Hiccup's wrist before slamming his hand and digging his into the rock for grip. Hiccup's weak body, weak and feeble, dangles over the fog and mist at the bottom of the Cliffside. Hiccup can just hear the waves of water crashing into the rocks below.

Hiccup shakes his head and finds his Dad gripping the rock, but it already looks weak. A simple stomp of a foot and their done. Stoick turns and looks to Hiccup.

"Hiccup, hang on!" Stoick cries.

"Dad, it won't hold us both." Hiccup says.

Stoick's breathing quickens. "It will. It will Hiccup!" His eyes began to water, and his voice cracked, as if he assumes this is the end.

Stoick looks to his son, so bruised and bleeding. They needed to get to the village. Gobber and the others had already started to fight the Outcast soldier the second Stoick charged. The men fire their arrows and Gobber and the kids use their shields and weapons to fight them off.

"Stoick! Hold on!" Gobber shouts.

Stoick was about to reply, but the crack in the rock increases and Hiccup's heart skips a beat every time he sees the fissures in the rock grow and extend, like veins of an arm, stretching out. The tip of the small rock in the side starts to rigidly tower over more and more. Stoick's eyes fill with tears as he tries to keep his grip strong. Hiccup knew it couldn't hold them, he also knew his Dad was stronger than him. Tears streamed down his father's face.

There was only one way.

Hiccup slowly reaches behind his back and draws his knife. He looks to his father.

"Dad," Stoick looks down, tears flowing down his flushed cheeks, and the plea in his eyes.

"Please." He whispers.

"I'm sorry. For everything." Hiccup says.

With that, Hiccup whips out his blade and slashes his father's wrist. Stoick cries out in pain, and in reflex, releases Hiccup's hand.

"No! No! Hiccup! HICCUP!" Stoick screeches.

A sharp, pain filled scream that echoes down into the fog and mist. Oothless, Astrid, Toothless and Gobber rush to the edge and just watch Hiccup fall into the white death. Stoick watches helplessly as his son falls into the cloud. He watches as it opens up its mouth and swallows Hiccup whole. He tries to reach down as if he could somehow float his son back up and into his arms. Toothless screams in horror and in such pain it chills everyone to the bone.

Soon his son's shadow vanishes and Stoick's left alone, and heartbroken.

He looks back up to Hadrian, and can feel the rage and anger germinating through his veins. Hadrian stares him dead in the eyes and says. "Men! Fall back!"

The men file out and Hadrian takes on last look to Stoick before walking off into the darkened woods. Stoick grips the side of the rock and grit his teeth to stop the tears, but the pain had a mind of its own, and it was going to eat him alive until he was hollow. A raging pit of darkness swells in his heart and eats away at his compassion and mercy until every remembrance that connected to hiccup was gone.

That night, a dreadful rainstorm flowed into the sky. As if the gods had witnessed Hiccup's sacrifice and were too, sad to see him go. The others remained sheltered under an outcropping of rocks in the cliff. Gobber and the dragons stood in the rain and Astrid had broken down in tears, and wouldn't stop. Not that anyone would stop her; it's as if she's channeling their emotions and the pain and agony they feel. Looking ahead at Stoick, he held a wooden cross and Hiccup's knife in his hands.

Toothless stood next to him, staring at the abyss that had swallowed his friend. Toothless' nose twitches uncontrollably, and his eyes appear as blank as Stoick's. Stoick gazes into the shiny reflective metal of Hiccup's knife, and with a flash of lightning, he can almost see Hiccup's eyes. That beautiful emerald green.

It only stabs Stoick in the heart even more. There was so much left unsaid, so much he should've said. Tears steam down his face, but Stoick couldn't tell if they were his, or mere raindrops. A bolt of lightning flashes behind him, and Stoick can almost hear Thor's cries of anger. Stoick grips the cross, and in a horrid cry of mourning, impales it into the ridge. Dirt and pebbles scatter and Stoick falls to his knees, just as he did before when he faced Toothless and his son after the demise of the Red Death.

And that's when he broke down crying and sobbing. He didn't ever try to be strong. How could he?

His wife, and now his son were gone.

He had no one.

He was all alone in the world. And it was all because of Hadrian.

Stoick let the rain trickle down his face, down his arms, his sides. It felt like the tears streaming down his face. His heart beats harder and time escapes him, his trembling hands gripping the handle of the sword. He tries to scream out his lungs, but his voice is numb.

What was he to do?

What more could he do?

The rest of his world crumbles into ash and oblivion. A crushing weight that makes breathing almost impossible.

All he can do while the sun rises over the horizon, is hope that she's found him on the other side.

#### 15. Chapter 14

Stoick stayed with his hands gripping the wooden cross until the sun rose on the horizon. The rain had stopped and his mind and body had enough time to process what had just happened. He could feel Gobber's feet walking to him. Stoick took a deep breath and waited for him to say something.

"Stoick, I . . . I just . . . I'm so sorry." Is all Gobber can say. Seems Stoick isn't the only one mourning. But everyone knows that nothing can match his pain. Nothing will.

"I know. But we can't stop now." Stoick says in a steady voice as he rises from the ground, and finally releasing his rigid grip on the cross. Tiny bee sting-like splinters making their home in his palm. "We need to get back to the village and warn the other Vikings. Losing Hiccup will not be in vain, I'm going to make sure of that."

Without another word or question, Stoick mounts Thornado and the others follow. But Toothless doesn't budge. He stays near the grave, and coos in sorrow. "What about Toothless?" Astrid asks.

Stoick looks to him, and his heart wrenches. He dismounts and walks over to Toothless. Placing his hand on Toothless' shoulder, he rubs back and forth. "Take your time. Come back when you're ready."

Toothless turns and nuzzles Stoick's hand. He coos, and it sounds like a cry, and Stoick strokes the Night Fury's head. Sometime last night, Gobber had restored Toothless' tail, but he hadn't made any attempts to fly. Not that anyone would blame him for not trying. With one final stroke, Stoick left Toothless' side and mounted Thornado. The teens fly off toward the village, and Astrid takes one final look behind her and watches as the clouds soon overlap the ridge and obscure Toothless and the grave from sight.

Tears sting her eyes, and she grips the handle on her duel-bladed axe. She looks up and sees an oncoming pine branch. She grips her axe and slices at the branch, letting out a blood-curdling screech. Fishlegs and the others look to her in shock and concern.

"I'm going to murder that son of a half-troll, rat-eating, munch bucket!" she snarls through her grit teeth.

"I don't care what you do to the others, I'll even let you have Alvin." Stoick suddenly interjects. "But Hadrian is mine."

Astrid loosens her grip and keeps her head down as she sees the village come into sight. They land in the Town's Square and Stoick hops off of Thornado and walks in the direction of the Great Hall.

He stops for a moment. "Gobber,"

"Yes, Stoick?" Gobber answers.

"Round the villagers to the Great Hall. We need to tell them the news, and the plan."

"Of course." Gobber says without another word.

"I'll join you shortly."

But before they could, they heard a soft voice call to them. Everyone turns and finds Heather running toward them with her parents not far behind. She's waving and a smile on her face, pleased to see them unharmed.

"Heather!" Fishlegs calls over.

Astrid tries to hide her scowl as she approaches. When she reaches the Vikings, she doubles over and tries to catch her breath.

"I'm so glad you're all okay." She says before she realizes. "Wait, where's Hiccup?"

Everyone looks down and Astrid's grip on her axe tightens.

"Let's all just meet into the hall." Gobber says as he leaves the kids away from Stoick, and Heather couldn't help but take a wild guess, and her heart wrenches.

Back in the woods, the Outcasts hid out in secret grottos within the caves of Berk. Hadrian had been training in the woods, and the soldiers were taking a breather after Hiccup's death. One soldier sitting on a rock on the outside of the cave nudges Alvin as he sharpens his hand-held scythe. He looks and the soldier gestures him to talk to Hadrian. Alvin annoyedly sight, but gets up and walks over to Hadrian just as he shot three arrows at a sloppily painted target on the tree. Each arrow hit the target exactly, splitting one after the other down the middle.

"You had better have a good reason for interrupting my training." Hadrian says, not even sparing a look at Alvin.

"Well, seeing as how the boy's dead, what good is it that we stay here? After all, the whole point in coming here was to search and destroy the boy."

Hadrian coldly snickers. "Oh Alvin. You really do have a small brain. Or rather no brain. You see, killing Hiccup was only part one of my plan. And since that was taken care of rather smoothly, we now move on to faze two. And that's, taking over Berk."

"Oh, ho, ho really? And how do you suppose we do that?" Alvin challenges.

"One at a time. We take out the main characters of the village. Stoick, Gobber, and those annoying children. After that, the village is ours." Hadrian explains as he removes the arrows from the bark.

"What makes you so sure that the village will surrender after that?" Alvin asks.

"Alvin, if there's one thing you should know, it's to never question my authority." Hadrian says, and in an instant, Hadrian whirls around and brings the tip of his dagger directly under Alvin's chin.  
"Understand?"

Alvin swallows a thick lump in his throat. "Yes sir."

"Good," Hadrian says, retracting his knife. "Now go play with the others."

Stoick mounts the steps to the Great Hall as Gobber ushers in the villagers. Stoick makes his way, blindly to the head of the fire pit. As he came to the head, he reached out and rests his hands flat on the outer border and breathes. He watches as the Hall fills, and Gobber and the kids come in and stand behind him. Stoick takes a deep breath and raises his head to face the crowd of Vikings.

"I've called you all here today, because I have an important announcement." Stoick rubs his hands together and nervously clears his throat. "Last night, Hadrian and the Outcasts infiltrated the village. They, attacked Hiccup, in our own home. Hiccup had tracked him to the ridge." Stoick stops to chuckle, and his eyes glisten with water. "You've should've seen him. He put up such a fight. But in the end, Hiccup," Stoick swallows. "in the end, he gave his life to save us. To save me."

Stoick lowers his head and stokes his lips and beard. He waits as the gasps and sudden whispers waves through the crowd, and soon turns to sniffles and choked sobs. Heather, being one of them. She brings a hand to her mouth to mask the sobs. Stoick raises a hand to silence them and everyone hushes one another and turns their attention to Stoick.

"Now I know we suffered a, great loss, but that's precisely why we need to stay strong, no become stronger. And avenge my son's death." Stoick preaches.

And the room immediately floods with cheers and roars. Fists punch to the air, and cheers echo across the Hall. And Stoick can feel that they have a martyr. And Hadrian will pay.

Back at the cave, the dragons all gather as Hadrian stands near the shore. The Cauldron submerges from the sea water, the Whispering Death bursts from the dirt, and the new Changewing materializes from trunk of a pine tree.

Hadrian walks in a circle, inspecting the dragons. Once he finishes, he goes back into the center of the circle they created.

"Listen up. The men on this island do not trust you. These men want nothing to do with you. They just automatically assume since you're on my side, your no good. Un-trainable. Useless. If you lower your guard for one moment, they will turn on you. Imprison you."

The dragons roar in reply. "Seizing power today, is a matter of life and death. You must be swift and decisive. Stoick and each of the Viking children must be taken out simultaneously. The men have been placed in my command while we overthrow the village. And most importantly, don't hesitate to give them everything you've got."

Each of the dragons hiss and roar in answer to his speech. Hadrian smiles at the dragons as he hears oncoming footsteps. He looks in between the Whispering Death and the Changewing, to find Savage running toward them. Hadrian leaves the circle of dragons and meets Savage halfway.

"Sir, we scouted the village, and it seems that Stoick's gathered everyone in the Great Hall. No doubt informing them about Hiccup's demise." Savage reports.

"Excellent. That'll give us plenty of time to fan out and set the traps." Hadrian says with a smile as he turns back to the dragons. "Ready the men. Get them into their formations and wait on my signal."

Savage nods and hustles back to the cave. Hadrian traces his fingers along the Whispering Death's nose, and the dragon snorts. Huffing through his nose.

"Everything is under control, and soon, I will have vengeance."

Later that evening, the kids were in the arena, practicing for any attack Hadrian will be planning. They've been practicing with shields, knives, hammers, swords and axes for three hours. After Stoick dismissed everyone in the meeting, they've been preparing ever since. Meanwhile, Stoick has secluded himself in his home, sitting in his chair, huddled by the fire. He originally was going to do his woodwork, but nothing would come to him. It would calm him, but he seems to have lost the will to do anything. All that keeps him going is avenging Hiccup's name. That Hadrian will pay, and they will finally be rid of this demon forever.

Heather went home with her parents to process the information and Toothless still hasn't come back, and Stoick knows why. He probably needs space. Away from the village since everything connects to Hiccup in some way for him. Toothless knows how to find his way back, even on foot. He might even be out looking for Hiccup. Guess he and Stoick have that in common. It really doesn't feel like he's gone,

course it could just be denial. Either way, sitting around moping won't help. They needed to be ready.

Stoick decides to get up and go and join Gobber in the shop. He needed to get out of the house. He walks through the village, looking around to see everyone prepping for any move, and the hammering in Gobber's shop helps to guide him to the shop.

"Hello Gobber." He says.

"Oh, Stoick. I didn't hear you come in. Need anything?" Gobber asks as he wipes his sweaty forehead.

"Actually, I needed to get out of the house. I came to see you and how you're doing." Stoick says as he picks up a freshly sharpened axe.

"How are you, really?" Gobber asks as he interchanges his hand into tweezers.

Stoick takes a seat on a barrel and sighs heavily. "I can't seem to wrap my head around it. How could this have happened? Who loses a wife and his son?!"

"There, there old friend. I'm sure he's watching us. And he needs you to be the proud, strong chief that you are." Gobber says with a comfort hand on his shoulder. "I'm not saying you can't mourn over him, you can, just not now. Hiccup would want you to focus and avenge his name."

"I know." Stoick painfully agrees.

Suddenly, a guard is running through the village, calling to Stoick. He's waving his hands, and there's a frantic look in his eyes. Stoick runs out of the shop and comes to meet the Viking.

"What's wrong?" He asks as the Viking tries to catch his breath.

Stoick recognizes him, he was a friend of the family.

"Sir, I saw a Whispering Death burrowing through the woods. It seemed to be rogue. Completely insane and destroying anything that came into its path." He explains.

"What?" Stoick questions as he feels Gobber walk up behind him.

"That's not all, my son said he saw a Scauldron in the waters near Mulch and Bucket's boat. Most likely trying to get a free meal with those fish. And on top of that, I heard another Viking say that while he was out hunting, a Changewing had fired its acid at him and nearly chopped his foot off."

"Three rogue dragons all attacking at once? This is too coincidental." Gobber comments.

"That's because their master is sending them out. No doubt it's a trap from Hadrian." Stoick says. "Finn, you go and ready the Vikings around the village. If Hadrian's trying to split us up, we need to be

ready for an invasion. Gobber let's get the kids and the dragons."

"I thought you'd never ask." Gobber says.

Stoick and Gobber fly on Thornado to the arena and informed the kids.

"We'll need to split up. But at the same time, we need to be extra careful. No doubt Hadrian's got some plan up his sleeve. So be on the alert." Stoick informs and the kids nod. "It's already been decided that Gobber and I will handle the Whispering Death. So, how you propose we divide?"

"I can handle the Scauldron." Astrid starts.

"Very well, anyone else?" Stoick asks, and when no one offers, he then assigns with what's left. "Alright, Fishlegs and Snotlout, you can deal with the Changewing, and the twins, you can stay here and help guard the village."

And for once, the twins didn't argue. They simply nod their heads and join the others as they mount their dragons.

Stoick mounts Thornado with Gobber and tells the kids. "When you're finished, come back here and help to guard the village."

"Wait, sir?" Fishlegs says raising his hand.

"Yes Fishlegs?" Stoick says as he grabs Thornado's rope.

"How should we approach this, situation." He hesitantly asks.

Stoick pauses for a moment, and his arms relax, lowering the rope for a moment. "Try it Hiccup's way first. If that doesn't work, try a more, direct approach."

And that's all he says before he snaps Thornado's reins and takes off. Before flying off, each of the teens brushed up on their information for each dragon, copying notes and important facts. The teens then split up as they leave the arena, all wishing one another good luck.

Astrid and Stormfly fly off to the harbor and she can immediately spot the Scauldron. He's swimming around all of the docked ships. He swims and circles them, popping his head a couple times to spray his water, and to destroy the docks. Astrid keeps a key note on the venom in its teeth and tries to figure out a game plan as she swoops in.

The dragon immediately spots her and sprays its boiling water. She swoops out of the way, but catches another spray and she and Stormfly spiral down and into the docks. On the impact of the landing, Astrid was thrown off of Stormfly and sent skipping across the wood and dirt until she finally hits the grass. She pushes herself to her hands and knees and spits out blades of grass.

"Stormfly!" she cries as she runs over to her dragon. Stormfly raises her head and coos. "Oh thank Thor you're okay."

"I have to say, this was just way too easy." She hears behind her. She turns and sees Hadrian standing on the head of the Scauldron, just behind its horn. "I should've known your passion for dragons would lead you here, hook, line and sinker."

"Why did you send the thing here?" Astrid asks as she and Stormfly stand.

"I believe the term, decoy comes into play here." Hadrian says. "This was the only way you cowards would come out of hiding." The dragon lowers its head and Hadrian steps off.

"Well now you're going to regret it!" Astrid snaps as she charges forward.

Hadrian runs to her and Astrid blocks as he throws the first two punches, then grabbing his wrist, she yanks it down and raises her foot, kicking him straight in the face and sending him flying into the knee deep section of sea water. Hadrian breaks the surface immediately and scowls. He leaps out of the water, into the air and tackles Astrid. They roll back and Hadrian grabs her by the shirt and punches her left and right, the kicks her into a deeper portion of the water.

She had barely broken the surface when Hadrian's foot comes crashing into her face, sending her back under. Hadrian snickers as he grabs her braid and yanks her up. He was about to give her another punch when she fists her hand and sweeps Hadrian's feet out from under him and knocking him back. Astrid then tackles him while he's down, and pushes his head under the surface. She can just make out the outline of his face and expressions. He lets a mass of bubbles escape and just when she thought he was done, his feet suddenly come up out of the water and his ankles wrap around her neck and fling her back. Hadrian bursts through the surface, gasping for a big breath of air.

Behind them, back on the land, the Scauldron has crawled out of the water and Stormfly hisses and roars with despise. The Scauldron roars in return and belts up a harsh pressure of water at Stormfly. She flies out of the way and breathes her fire, and the Scauldron extinguishes it with more water. It then tackles Stormfly, and goes for a lethal bite on her neck to inject its venom. Stormfly kicks it off and roars.

Hadrian and Astrid battle in hand to hand combat and Hadrian slams Astrid in the jaw with an uppercut and she goes hurdling back, but on the first bounce she flips and she's back on her feet. Now that's she's out of the water, she has a better grip on the land. Hadrian reaches behind and sends ten daggers zipping her way, she dodges them, and then rushing to a nearby ship to snatch a shield off the side. She just blocks more oncoming projectiles, but they were actually Stormfly's spines.

"Hey, Stormfly! Watch where you fling those things!" she yells.

As Stormfly looks to her, the Scauldron swipes its tail and knocks her into two trees. Then it swoops back into the water and rises up behind Hadrian. Astrid rushes to Stormfly's aid and she helps the dragon onto her feet. The Scauldron gulps down mouthfuls of seawater and then blasts it toward Astrid and Stormfly. Stormfly flies out of

the way and Astrid blocks it with her shield. Then Stormfly shoots at it with her spines, but Hadrian tosses some hand-made smoke bombs and an explosion blinds Astrid and Stormfly for a moment. Hadrian then back flips and lands on the Cauldron's head, and the two descend underwater.

Astrid and Stormfly rush to the shoreline and scan the water. They go about knee deep when suddenly the dragon yanks them both under. Both of them fight off the Cauldron's grip and break the surface. They cough and gag before they looks and see Hadrian rise from the water on top of the Cauldron's head, towering over the two.

Hadrian's tunic clings to his muscled body as it drips down his torso, and his hair sends streams scattering down his scared face. As much as Astrid hates to admit it, it did make him rather attractive.

"You know Astrid, Hiccup never liked you." Hadrian says.

"Don't even think that I'll fall for any of your lies." She snaps.

"I know everything Astrid. Remember?" Hadrian taunts.

"You may be a copy of Hiccup, but you two are completely different people!" Astrid states.

"Well, I can't argue with you there." Hadrian smiles and brushes some water off his shoulder as he speaks. "I mean he's smart, kind and compassionate. Too bad it's the very same thing that led to his demise-"

"Shut up!" Astrid yells and Stormfly breathes her fire in a beeline for Hadrian's head.

The Cauldron extinguishes it with its boiling water, and then it sprays again, knocking Stormfly back and crashing through several docks and ships before she slams into the stairs leading up to the village.

"Stormfly!" Astrid cries.

She looks to Hadrian and charges with her axe ready, but the Cauldron grabs her by the ankle with its tail and slaps her down into the water. She comes back up, her hair now down from the fight, and covering her face.

"You know Astrid, I actually feel sorry for you." Hadrian says as the Cauldron lowers its head and Hadrian walks down onto the water. "I mean, you and Hiccup had a budding relationship. Are you sad you didn't get a chance to say goodbye? To tell him how you truly felt about him?" Hadrian taunts as he crouches down to her level.

"Shut up!" she hisses.

"And you want to know a secret?" Hadrian leans in and whispers in her ear, "Hiccup actually believed you were the one."

And that was the nail in the coffin. Astrid's head jerks up and she has the most viscous snarl on her face. Like a wild animal on the

rampage. She springs up and punches him in the face with a jab and harsh uppercut. Hadrian flips back and lands on his feet, smiling as he's finally cracked her like an egg.

"It's your fault he's dead!" She screams as she comes swinging her axe sloppily. Not even trying to focus on him. She's just so mad, her emotions are riding her like a wave of the ocean. No direct path or destination, just wanting to get there and worry about nothing else. "It's your fault he had no choice but to set you free! Everything you do only hurts him more! You're nothing but a selfish, evil little troll!"

Astrid is throwing punches and swinging her axe at him in every direction. Hadrian can't even strike back for as soon as one punch is over, an axe comes swinging by his head. He dodges left and right until he leap up and back landing on the Scauldrone and as soon as he landed, the dragon raised its head and blasted Astrid with water.

Astrid is still standing, but slowly, the pressure of the Scauldrone's water brings her to her knees and then he swoops in and grabs her by the ankle, careful to not grip her with his venomous front tooth, and pulls her deeper. She lost her grips on her axe, so she digs her fingers into the sand to no avail. It drags her out until there's no ground for her feet to touch. The Scauldrone then blasts her and it pushes her under. She comes up gasping and choking and coughing up water.

Hadrian, still standing on the dragon's head smiles and pats the dragon's horn. "Finish her."

The Scauldrone sprays her again and she's flung under the surface. But the pressure doesn't stop. She can't stop spinning. Can't break free of the dragon's pressure. Can't get to the surface. Astrid's lungs burn, and her body screams and begs her to take a breath. She kicks out, lash with her arms, and fight against the water, but she's spun so many times she doesn't know which way is up.

"Guess you're not as tough as you think you, were." Hadrian says as he watches the bubbles drift and pop to the surface.

And then it stops.

## 16. Chapter 15

Stoick lands Thornado just outside a clearing in the woods. The Whispering Death explodes into the air in a shower of cobblestone, dirt, and fire. He breathes his deadly rings and immediately plunges into the ground again. He seems relentless, crazy. The clearing's been reduced to ash from the dragon's fire. Nothing remains but a pile of scorched debris and a large soot circle.

Stoick and Gobber run in, sword and axe ready and the dragon comes up again, and it roars, opening its wide mouth of rotating teeth. It burrows its head into the ground, and comes up with a large boulder and chuck it toward the two men. They leap in opposite direction and Stoick comes up on one knee.

"I assume we'll skip the gentle approach?" Gobber calls as the

dragon's tail lashes out and whips at Gobber. Gobber jumps out of the way and slashes with his axe.

The dragon screeches and hisses. "I'm sorry son." Stoick whispers as he charges.

The dragon lashes out his tail, and in an instant, Stoick latches onto it and as it swings him up high, he lets go. Falling at a gracious speed, Stoick slams his foot into the dragon's nose. Pushing off, he flips and lands on a nearby rock. The dragon slides back, and after shaking its head, it roars with hatred and charges for Stoick. Standing there with a smug on his face, Stoick waits until the last minute, then jumps out of the way and Gobber comes hurdling and punches the dragon again and sends it skipping back across the ash, sending up thick clouds. It crashes into multiple trees, all of which comes crashing down.

The dragon bursts from the trees and screeches in fury. It breathes its rings of fire and as Gobber dodges, it suddenly wraps its tail around him. Gobber struggles to free himself as the dragon brings him close its face, and it snarls.

Gobber sneers. "Sorry to burst your boulder bubble big boy, but I'm much stronger than I look."

Gobber then head-butts the Whispering Death and once its grip loosens, he slams his fist into the dragons nose. Stoick meanwhile grabs one of the burning trees that fell to the ground form the dragon's force, and chuck in the dragon's direction. It slaps it in the face, and the dragon screeches in pain. It tries to focus but, its vision is blurry. It can just make out Stoick's silhouette, and it takes the hit of his fist into the side of its head. Even after it crashes and slides across the dirt, it immediately rises, roars and burrows underground.

"This thing's quite persistent." Gobber says as he readies his axe. "But there's nothing to destroy here. No buildings, homes, nothing. Why would Hadrian send him here?"

Stoick didn't have time to answer as the dragon bursts from the ground and whacks its tail like a whip at Gobber and Stoick. Both dodge and Gobber slices at its body, just behind its wings, and rolls to Stoick's side, coming up on one knee.

Meanwhile, over on a mountain ridge, Fishlegs and Snotlout land their dragons and try to look for the Changewing. Fishlegs noticed that Snotlout was strangely quiet. For once he has nothing to say, about anything. He's not making fun of Fishlegs, he hasn't tried to be the hero lately. Maybe Hiccup's death really did take a toll on him. Maybe in his own way he really cared for him. And now, even with him grieving, Fishlegs hopes that Snotlout feels bad about everything he did to him, and vows to never do it again. It may be bad, but really, it's the least he could do. They don't say much since none of them really know what to say to each other. Maybe it's because Hiccup's gone and Fishlegs was his best friend? Whatever the case, it had better be the last thing on his mind, for now.

They walk onto the open ridge and look around, and nothing's in site. Then again, a Changewing can blend into anything.

"Be careful Snotlout." Fishlegs says, and Snotlout just nods.

They walk around the ridge, rotating so they can see what's coming. And suddenly, Fishlegs hears a hiss. He spins around just in time to see the head of the Changewing materialize and splurt out some acid. Both boys tumble and roll out of the way just as Fishlegs had time to yell, "Watch out!"

The boys come up and the dragon slowly crawls out of the rock, its mouth dripping with acid. It hisses and both boys snarl. Fishlegs lets out a battle cry and charges the dragon. It spews out its acid and Snotlout dodges and goes for the dragon on the opposite side. He reaches out and manages to slice at the dragon on the side of his stomach, distracting it and giving Fishlegs the chance to whack it in the head with his hammer. The dragon roars and shakes its head as Fishlegs and Snotlout back up and assess what to do next.

"Yeah that's right! That just happened!" Snotlout shouts and laughs.

"We need to get this over with and get back to Stoick and the others. No doubt Hadrian's got some reason for dividing us." Fishlegs says and Snotlout nods as the dragon's aim restores and spits at the boys.

Snotlout whips out his own bludgeon and chuckles it to the dragon, but it manages to catch it and burn it in its mouth with its acid breath. Then it swallows it and aims for Snotlout; he manages to roll out of the way but a few drops catch on his ankle. He rolls around d yelping and calling.

"Hot! Hot! Hot!" he stammers, finally settling in a small puddle.

Steam rises up off the water and just as the dragon was about to finish him, Fishlegs comes up from behind the dragon and with his hammer in hand, he was about to whack it, but an arrow knocks it out of his hand. Fishlegs lands on the dragon's back and it stretches its head back and chomps on Fishlegs' upper half, sending back and flying into Snotlout. Fishlegs rises, covered in dragon saliva. He shudders and wipes it off, then both boys look up and see a shadow move through the trees.

"Did you see that?" Fishlegs asks as Snotlout shoves him off.

The boys look around and focus back on the dragon, but it has stopped and now just glares at them.

"Well, this is quite the team they've gathered." Hadrian's voice echoes through the trees. "You two were the last I'd expect to be working together." He says as he comes out from the shadows.

"You'd be surprised the sacrifices we make to avenge our fallen." Snotlout says as he takes a fighting stance.

"Hey!" Fishlegs snaps, but strangely, he wasn't as upset as he expected. Maybe because it's a flash of Snotlout's old personality; it's irritating yet rejuvenating at the same time.

"Avenge? You never liked Hiccup. You always assumed him as your

rival." Hadrian says as he walks over to the Changewing.

"We're still family, and that means I have to avenge him!" Snotlout snaps.

"Family? Interesting," Hadrian says stroking his chin. "I've never seen family mock one another, torture one another. And even try to embarrass them-"

"Shut up!" Snotlout snaps as he chuckls a knife; but Hadrian easily catches it in between his pointer and middle finger.

He brings the knife closer, spinning it between his fingers until his fingers coil around the hilt. "Not bad, but I've seen better. Besides, what are you so upset about? I figured you'd be happy your rival's gone. Isn't it what you wanted?"

"I said shut up!" Snotlout snaps as he charges for Hadrian.

"Snotlout no!" Fishlegs cries, but it was too late.

Riding the wave of his fury, Snotlout swings his fist at Hadrian and easily misses, and Hadrian knees him in his diaphragm and kicks him with his heel in Snotlout's jaw. Snotlout jerks back and bounces in the dirt. He pushes himself to prop on one elbow and adjusts his jaw, not broken, but awfully close. Fishlegs keeps flicking his eyes back and forth between Hadrian and the dragon, unsure of who to strike. If he attacks one, the other might intervene. So Fishlegs helps Snotlout up and Snotlout dusts himself off.

"You had a reason for bringing us out here. What is it?" Fishlegs suddenly asks.

Hadrian chuckles and crosses his arms. "You're smarter than the others, I'll give you that, Fishlegs. But I assumed you would have it figured out by now."

Hadrian places his hands behind his back and casually strolls back and forth.

"The reason why I want revenge is because I want what was taken from me. My life." He begins.

"It was never yours to begin with." Snotlout interjects.

Hadrian simply snickers while the Changewing hisses to silence him. "Even so, I wanted that life. The freedom, the power I wielded. The fear I put in anyone who dared to oppose me. Being the heir to Alvin was a fraud, and he deserved as much as you and your 'Dragon Conqueror'. That boy is a waste of space, and he was such a coward. If he wasn't going to make use of it, I was."

"That still doesn't explain why you want Berk." Fishlegs says. "Hiccup may have trapped you, but why aim for the village?"

"I plan to overrule every aspect that relates to Hiccup, even the tiniest fraction. I want to dominate everything that was his, and rebuild it into my own image. For some time, he ruled over me, and now I will rule over him. Torturing him in his sleep was just the

beginning."

Hadrian walks back and forth, hands behind his back.

"As we speak, my troops are storming through Berk, ravaging, destroying and burning anything in their sights. And once you're all out of the way, I'll move on to the next village, and the net, and the next until every last thing standing in my way is gone."

In an instant, Hadrian snaps his fingers. On cue, the Changewing belches up more acid and aiming for the boys. Both dodge, but before Snotlout could even roll up to one knee, he's slammed in the face by Hadrian's foot. He then picks him up and hurdles him towards Fishlegs, and the two collide and hit the hard packed earth.

The boys immediately rise and hop on their dragons and fly high. The Changewing spits its acid left and right trying to hit them, but the boys dodge and hit the dragon with a collided combination of fire and bolder. Fishlegs looks down and sees Hadrian leaning against a tree.

Even up in the air, Fishlegs somehow hears him when he whispers, "Have fun boys." Then he take two steps back into the shadow of the trees.

Back by Gobber and Stoick, the Whispering Death was weakening; multiple slashes, cuts and gashes have led it to be weak and unable to burrow underground. Thornado howls at the dragon and it screeches a high-pitched scream as it tosses and turns, trying to escape the funnel of noise. Thornado swoops in and wraps his tail around the dragon's neck and does a full circle, whipping it up and into the dirt. Gobber then rushes in and pounds his now switched axe hand, into a hammer, and continually pounds at the dragon until he feels its body deflate from under him. He stands and looks around to see the dragon's body limp.

Stoick lands Thornado and hops off as Gobber jumps off the dragon's unconscious body. "Finally! We won!" he shouts, raising his hammer in the air.

"Now we can focus on stopping Hadrian. I hope the kids are okay." Stoick says.

But while the men had their back turned, the Whispering Death slowly and silently raises its head and narrows its eyes at Stoick and Gobber. But instead of attacking, the dragon slowly turns to Thornado, who's facing his master, and it shoots at least ten of its spines at the dragon. Just as the dragon roars in pain, the Whispering Death drops its head to avoid suspicions.

"Thornado?" Stoick says as he looks to his dragon. Both men go to the dragon and see the spines.

"That thing sure likes to have the last word." Gobber says.

"We need to get back to the village and get Goathi to-"

As Stoick explains, the Whispering Death silently raises its tail and clenches it tight. Gobber looks behind him just in time to push Stoick out of the way and take the heavy and unexpected blow of the

dragon's tail. Stoick bounces once before he pushes himself up on his hands and knees; but as he did, he watches Gobber topple over the edge of the cliff, just past the clearing; eyes closed and unconscious. Stoick goes limp, but finds himself at the edge of the cliff, unable to account what just happened. Reaching down, he watches Gobber fall until he loses sight of him in the waves that crash into the rocky shore.

"Gobber!"

Behind him he hears a maniacal laughter. He whirls around and sees Hadrian, and the Whispering Death gone. Hadrian's laughing, but Stoick was too in shock to move. He can only glare with anger, hatred and grief as he watches Hadrian sink into the earth, and is gone.

Snotlout and Fishlegs watch as the Changewing doubles over, breathing heavily as small drops of acid drip from its mouth. It had used up its shot limit, and now was the time to strike. It was too weak to even change color, giving the boys a chance to finish it. They swoop down and hop off their dragons. They slowly approach the dragon, weapons ready; but as they were about to deliver the final blow, the dragon's head suddenly snaps up and disappears.

"What?" Fishlegs stammers.

Suddenly, Hookfang and Meatlug are both slammed with boiling water and sent crashing into the dirt, leaving five foot deep ruts in their wake.

"Hookfang!" Snotlout cries.

But before he could even take a step toward him, the ground underneath them trembles and vibrates. A large crack twists and turns until it reaches under both boys' feet and opens wide, like a gaping monster. Both boys fall through, but Fishlegs grabs a rock nearest to the top, and Snotlout embeds his knife into the side next to Fishlegs. But suddenly, another crack snakes across and breaks apart the rock his knife is in and it crumbles and Snotlout falls into the abyss. Fishlegs squeezes his eyes shut and grits his teeth as he hears Snotlout's scream weakens more and more. He looks up and sees Hadrian, with the Cauldron, the Whispering Death and the Changewing surrounding him.

Hadrian smiles, "Be sure to give my regards to Hiccup and Astrid."

"Astrid? What did you do to her?!" Fishlegs demands.

Hadrian just keeps smiling. "This."

He then snaps his fingers and the Cauldron opens its mouth and blasts Fishlegs with its boiling water.

Hadrian flies back to the village on the Changewing only to see the place looking like a warzone. Buildings belch up black charcoal smoke and what seemed to be the Plaza had multiple spilt wheelbarrows and barrels of food, along with sacks of flour. Hadrian looks down to see the men gathered in the arena and the village Square. He lands the dragon outside the arena and walks in through the gates. Alvin and

Savage were conversing with Mildew and two other soldiers. Savage is the first to notice Hadrian and taps Alvin on the shoulder. Alvin turns and smiles. They step apart and let Hadrian see the caged dragons. Hookfang, Meatlug, Stormfly and Barf and Belch.

"Where are the twins?" Hadrian asks.

"They've been placed in the dungeon sir. They await your orders of what to do with them." Savage reports.

"And what about the Night Fury?" he asks as he approaches the cages with his hands behind his back.

"It was at the house when we attacked, but then it flew off into the woods." Savage says.

"And you didn't pursue." Hadrian adds, not even looking over his shoulder to Savage.

"No sir, we assumed out position was needed here in overthrowing the village." Savage says, but beads of sweat materialize on his forehead.

"Very well. Once the village is under control, we will advance into the woods and search for the Night Fury." He says as he turns and passes Savage. Savage lets out a breath of relief. "Excellent work men. I'm impressed. I couldn't have done it without you. But, our conquest is not yet complete. The kids are down, but Stoick is still out there. Keep an eye out for him in the village. I'll go and see if he's up for a little, reunion."

With that, Hadrian snatches his bow and whip and walks off through the village and into the woods, where Stoick is most likely waiting for him. Hadrian walks the natural trail for an hour, and nothing happens. He begins to assume that Stoick had fled; even if it was off to another village, he'll be found. Hadrian even begins to play around with his bow as he approaches familiar ground. The Cove was only a few meters away.

Then suddenly, there was a rustle of leaves, and just as Hadrian looks up, Stoick springs from the trees and tackles Hadrian with a battle cry. Hadrian slides forward and front flips, out of the way, drawing his knife; blade out.

Stoick lands and rolls, coming up on his feet, fists clenched tight. "You had better have back up. You're going to need it." He snarls through grit teeth.

"Aw, what's a matter Stoick? Feeling lonely now that I've exterminated your son and friends?" Hadrian mocks.

Stoick feels his stomach tighten and churn. Astrid. Fishlegs. Gobber. Stoick's fist tightens. Hadrian takes a moment to look at Stoick. He defiantly seemed different. A look in his eyes intimidated Hadrian, and cautions him to watch it. He seems rather, unstable. Probably processing all that he's lost. But he was going down no matter what.

"You really should've known better than to have two dope-headed twins guard your village." Hadrian says. "And just wait until you see what

I'll do with the dragons, 'cause I certainly don't need them."

Suddenly, Stoick tackles Hadrian and bends his arm behind his back, but Hadrian doesn't scream. It hurts, but Hadrian would never give Stoick the satisfaction of knowing he has him under control.

"It's one thing to have a grudge with my son, and you can even involve me. But what did the villagers ever do to make you want to attack them?" Stoick hisses.

"They know you." Hadrian growls, and suddenly, the Whispering Death bursts from the ground, separating them.

Hadrian flips midair and lands on his feet sliding to a stop. He looks over the dragon and sees Stoick get up. "I'll give you one last chance to surrender." He says in a deep raspy voice.

"Don't make me laugh." Hadrian smiles while the dragon steps back off to the side.

Stoick charges and throws multiple punches towards Hadrian's face. Hadrian crosses his wrists, making an X to block the attacks. Then Hadrian goes for his own punch, and an uppercut, Stoick dodging both. Then when he goes for a punch, Stoick steps to the side, letting Hadrian's momentum carry him over, and Stoick grabs around his waist and chucks him forward. Hadrian turns and lands on his feet, in a clean cut landing.

Hadrian then runs up and fakes left whirling around and slamming his foot flat on Stoick's chest. Stoick slides back and wobbles, but pushes himself up to regain his balance. Then Hadrian comes in for the attack, and Stoick simply mimics his block of the face. After Stoick dodges, he sees a chance and grabs Hadrian's wrist. Hadrian's eyes widen for a moment before spinning him in a circle and pinning him to the trunk of an oak.

"You will pay for taking my son, and you will pay for the destruction you have caused!" he yells.

"And just how do you propose to do that?! I got what I wanted, and you and your 'Vikings' fell for my trap too easily!" Hadrian counters.

"What do you mean? You merely wanted to separate us!" Stoick growls.

"So you think." Hadrian corrects with a twisted smile. He hisses through the pain. "True, I did want to separate you to divide and conquer, but you left your village without your protection. You left them in the hands of the twins."

Suddenly, Hadrian twists his wrist and spins and pins Stoick in the same position. "They may be warriors, but you'd be surprised at how lost they can be without a leader!"

Stoick screams and goes for a head-but back, but Hadrian swerves and loosens his grip on Stoick's wrists. Stoick fake punches him and jumps back, and in an instant, the Whispering Death comes out of the ground with Hadrian standing on its head. They rise up high, towering

over Stoick. Stoick turns and runs, but Hadrian and the dragon pursue forward, the dragon shooting its spines from its body.

Stoick jumps back and forth and quickly jumps, turns and tosses an explosive at the dragon. It bursts with a bright light and stuns the dragon, making fall to the ground, and Hadrian tumbling. The dragon's head falls to his side. Hadrian grits his teeth and forces himself up, rubbing his arm which took the first hit of the fall.

"You're a part of my son, which means you don't belong with the Outcasts. You can do better." Stoick says.

"Ha! You don't know anything about me." Hadrian snaps. And the Whispering Death shoots more of its spines.

Stoick brings out his sword and runs toward Hadrian, slicing and knocking any spines that hurdle toward him. Then after leaping over the Whispering Death — knocking the hilt of his sword at its head in the process — he tosses his sword to his left hand and sucker punches Hadrian with his right. Hadrian skips backwards on his back, and landing on his side. He hugs his ribs and turns on his back to see the point of Stoick's sword inches from his heart.

"You could be one of us, Hadrian. You were a part of Hiccup, you should have some sympathy inside your twisted, butter soul." Stoick preaches.

"Ha, very funny. I'm made up of every negative emotion and feeling Hiccup ever had, while it wasn't much, it was enough." Hadrian says.

"You cared once." Stoick points out.

"That was when I was still in development." Hadrian counters. "And now that I'm entirely my own being, I have no sympathy for you, or any of your soldiers. Face it Stoick, there's nothing you can say to get me to change. I'm a sociopath."

Then Hadrian knocks away Stoick's sword with his knife and a sudden hot blast of water slams into Stoick's chest, sending him flying back. He first lands on his hands, then pushes off and lands on his feet. The earth starts to rumble beneath him. He looks up and sees Hadrian on his feet, the Cauldron behind him and the Whispering Death's rut in sight.

"If you think you had the slightest chance of 'rescuing' me you you're dead wrong." Hadrian says, biting off every syllable.

Sharp rock pillars erupt from the ground, and Stoick hops back left and right on each foot. The Cauldron sprays a heavy, and powerful mist, blowing back Stoick's fur cape.

"I wanted to be this way. I wanted to go to the Outcasts." He says, his voice rising. "And I wanted to annihilate you and your pathetic village!"

Hadrian leaps forward, and with the blade of his knife out, he slices back and forth at Stoick's arms, neck and face. Stoick goes for a punch, but Hadrian hop and slams his feet into Stoick's chest, and pushing off, flips back. A heavy sized boulder, shot from the

Whispering Death flies toward Stoick, slamming into him and crashing into the woods, knocking over three trees. As Hadrian walks closer, the Whispering Death and the Cauldron switch between rock and water attacks; Stoick doesn't even have the timing to get to his hands and knees. With one final rock thrown from the Whispering Death, Stoick's hit back and slamming his spine into the ground, leaving with little breath. He stretches his eyes open and sees Hadrian walk up and stand over him.

"And now, I'll never have to see your face, ever again." Hadrian gives Stoick one final, evil smile before snapping his fingers, and the Whispering Death dives down onto Stoick.

Stoick's chief helmet slides across the floor of the arena, and stops just at Alvin's foot. Alvin looks to it in shock and slowly picks it up, staring at it.

"I, I can't believe it." He stammers.

"Hm, well believe it boys, because it's happening."

Hadrian's voice carries as he walks up to the stage outside the arena, where the chief's chair awaits. Two men stand guard and the Outcast men gather around it, and in the arena.

"You see gentlemen, now that you belong to me," He turns and sits in the chief's chair, crosses his legs and intertwines his fingers.

"Berk belongs to us."

## 17. Chapter 16

A gray overcast spreads across the skies of Berk. The pounding of Outcast soldiers echoes through the quiet streets, mimicking the sound of thunder. They march through the streets, the Square, the Plaza; squad after squad until every street has a squad marching through it. The village has become gray, quiet, abandoned. Hadrian watches from the roof of Hiccup's old home. Poised at the top of the banister, his hands held behind his back, he gazes at the village. He smiles, then turns and walks off.

Fog dwindle through the houses and alleyways. Small divisions of men stand on the sides of the street, standing straight and tall. The wind rushes through the streets, howling at the houses. Blowing debris and shrapnel everywhere. Hadrian, now at the Academy, watches from the stage as the men march through the streets, and now two men stand guard at the front of the Academy. Alvin and Mildew usually hang out in the arena, but Hadrian couldn't care, as long as they were out of his hair. Hadrian decides to enter the arena while some men were currently sharpening some weapons. They stop and ten hut when Hadrian walks by.

"At ease men." Hadrian orders. Alvin and Mildew break their conversation and face Hadrian.

"Sir." Alvin says.

Hadrian nods, then turns and looks up to the sky, listening to the

distant thundering of the marching men.

"I still can't believe that ninety-pound Doppelganger, single-handedly managed to bring the entire village of Berk to its knees." Alvin tries to whisper to Mildew.

Hadrian chuckles. "Well believe it, Alvin, because it's happening."

At the sound of Hadrian's voice, Alvin goes rigid. Hadrian simply chuckles while peering over his shoulder. He then returns his gaze to the sky.

"A world without Stoick and his Vikings. I was beginning to think I'd never see the day. But at long last, the village is ours, and victory is mine." He turns to the men, and they straighten their form. "Fine work gentlemen. You have made me very proud."

"Thank you sir. It was fun." Alvin says, saluting Hadrian.

"And, as a reward, I'd like to promote you to Commander." Hadrian says.

This catches Alvin by surprise and it takes a moment to process.  
"Honestly, sir?"

"Yes, while I had my doubts with you, and while your lie from the past is still fresh, you've proven your loyalty, and for that, this is your reward." Hadrian explains.

"Thank you sir, that's quite an honor." Alvin says.

The gate to the arena opens, and Savage â€" along with a small gathering of men behind him â€" enter the arena. Savage salutes Hadrian and Hadrian tells him to at ease.

"Savage report." Hadrian commands.

"Sir, sector five is secure. Although it's been pretty quiet around here since all the people cleared out." Savage says.

"Hm, better get used to it men." Hadrian says as he makes his way out of the arena and up to the stage where he takes his seat in the chief's chair. "This village is only the first of many."

The sudden sound of a struggle catches his attention. He looks to see two guards escorting the black-haired girl from before. Heather. An eerie smile comes across his lips, and he gets up out of his chair to meet Heather and the guards. Her clothes had rips and tears in the, and they seemed to be covered with dirt. Her hair was still in a braid, but loose strands made it look messier than normal.

"Who do we have here?" he asks as the men force Heather to kneel in front of him.

"We caught her hiding in one of the ships near the dock." One guard says and he yanks her head back so she's forced to look to him. Her green eyes blink open and she scowls.

Hadrian simply smiles. "Interesting to see you around here gorgeous."

He says and he motions the men to bring her up to her feet.

She doesn't say anything, she just stares him down.

"Not much of a talker are you?"

"I have nothing to say to you." she hisses.

"So sorry it has to end this way, Heather." Hadrian traces his fingers along her shoulder, causing her to cringe, then he cups the nap of her neck. "It really does pain me to see a beautiful bloom like yourself to be reduced to such a low." He says while he braises his knuckles along her chin.

She cringes more and her feelings overwhelm her so much she nearly passes out. But Hadrian catches her and holds her up by her biceps. She manages to stand on her feet, but she's still weak.

"What shall we do with her sir?" the second guard asks.

Hadrian looks to her and she stares at him. The innocence in her eyes somehow touched Hadrian in some way.

He raises an eyebrow, and smiles. "Well, I don't seem to have a reason to eliminate you. So lucky you, you live to breathe another day. Keep her in one of the houses." He orders, and then he takes her arm and pulls her close, his lips brushing against her ear. "I think I might have a use for you."

Heather shudders and she never felt so happy to be taken away by the guards. Hadrian licks the corner of his mouth as he watches the men take her away.

Through the day, Hadrian makes his own scouting rounds around the village. His mind is rather occupied by the reminiscing of what he's gone through. He flashes back to when he was just a memory inside Hiccup's head, and now, he's the ruler of Berk. Hadrian's walk has led him back to Hiccup's house, with the Great Hall in sight.

"Well, it looks like we did it. They're really gone."

Deep underground, within the abandoned tunnels of the Whispering Death, a small fire glows across the stone. Casting a red glow across the rock, shadows dance across like in their own little world, where darkness doesn't exist, and nothing can harm them. Stoick tosses more sticks onto the fire, and the crackling is the closest thing to comfort he has.

He tries to suspend time and just be still for another moment, to let his tired and sore muscles rest. Cuts trail along his arms and hands; he can't even clench them without leaking blood. His clothes were shredded and soaked with blood. Somehow, he's still alive.

After Hadrian cued the dragon to attack, it pounded him into the dirt. It would've done more, and much worse if Stoick hadn't pretended to play dead after the first slam. After sinking faster into the dirt and ground, Stoick had managed to explore deeper into the tunnels and find refuge for now. Not long after, he found Gobber, wobbly walking around the tunnels himself. He knew Gobber was a fighter; somehow, he'd managed to find land and they ran into each

other in the tunnels.

Gobber left in the search for more survivors. But it's not like it matters. The village now belongs to Hadrian. It's over.

"Stoick!" Gobber suddenly calls, startling him.

Stoick looks up and sees Gobber walking, with something on his shoulder. No, not something. Someone. A closer look once they entered the cast of the fire shows that it's Fishlegs.

"Fishlegs!" Stoick exclaims. He springs up from his seat and aids Gobber in helping him over to the fire. "You're alright."

"Alive, but not okay." Fishlegs says with a rusty voice. And on cue his stomach growls like a hound.

They set him in front of the fire and Gobber immediately sits at his side to inspect his wounds and cuts. There were some small bits of rock embedding in his arms and hands, his pant legs were filled with holes, which explains why they have the less damage. The cuts were nothing serious, perfectly capable of healing on their own, but still a concern for infections.

"Do you know what happened to the dragons?" Stoick asks as he sits across the fire.

"I don't know." Fishlegs says. "The last thing I remember was Meatlug and Hookfang being blasted with the Scaudron's boiling water. Then the ground opened up beneath us, and Snotlout fell first," Fishlegs' voice hitches as he remembers Snotlout's scream falling down the hole.

"You're not going to cry are you?" a sudden voice rings out.

Fishlegs cowers and Stoick and Gobber stand ready, only see Snotlout materialize from the shadows. He is in the same condition as Fishlegs, possibly more cuts, but alive.

"Snotlout!" Fishlegs cries with joy. "You're back! You're okay!"

"Lucky us." Gobber mumbles under his breath.

"Well, I will admit I'm a little banged up, but it's nothing I can't handle." Snotlout boasts, only to be deflated as he whines and wince as he tries to sit down. But he's alive.

"Is Hookfang with you?" Stoick asks, yet already knowing the answer. He just needed something to extinguish the flicker of hope in his chest.

Snotlout shakes his head. And adding on a sulk look at the reminder of where his dragon is now.

"Is Astrid okay?" he asks, appearing genuinely concerned.

Everyone just lowers their heads. There was still no sign of Astrid since the team split. Stoick fears the worst, and Fishlegs' words

only seemed to fan the flame.

"Before Hadrian, 'finished me off', he said to give his regards to Astrid." He says fidgeting with his hands.

"Well, we obviously can't give up yet, as long as we're still here, there's got to be something that Thor's telling us." Gobber interjects. "I'm sure she's out looking for us, and we just need to hope."

Hope. The word that seems so foreign to Stoick since the day Hiccup perished. He had lost all of it, and it took Hadrian to conqueror his village to see it now. And before he faces the disappointment, he immediately stops himself from feeling the slightest hope that Hiccup is somehow miraculously alive. It's hard enough that he can barely comprehend that he's passed, how could facing the possibility that he's alive be any better.

And yet, maybe it wasn't denial.

Sure he wasn't physically with him, right now, but if he were really, truly gone, then Stoick would've gotten a feeling. And so far, nothing. Stoick tries not to let it get to him, it's nothing but false.

Meanwhile, back down by the shoreline, Astrid awoke to the sound of a voice. The sound echoes in her head, starting her from her sleep, causing her to rocket upward. She felt her chest tighten as her heart leaps into triple speed. She gasps and scrambles up, gripping the sand beneath her with clawed hands, surprised when she did not feel the coarse dryness of dirt, or the brittle bite of grit. She grew still and listens, her gaze darting.

There were no Outcasts. No demon dragons. Only cold, white moonlight. Astrid lets out a breath of relief, and pulls her knees into her chest. She tries to remember what happened, how she got here, and where she's supposed to go. The last she can recall was Hadrian's Cauldron pulling her down and pelting her with its water breath. She turns to her side and sees a small puddle of water. Her clothes were nearly dry, so she's been here for some time, and the puddle has nearly vanished into the moisten sand. Her throat stings when she swallows and she has a bitter aftertaste of salt on her tongue.

She tries to remember.

After Hadrian had blasted her with the water, she was flung deeper into the water. There was pain, a burning, and a darkness. Then it went away. She had gotten used to the water, and the world had darkened around her. Then something wrapped around her and hauled her through the water and to the surface. There was a lot of coughing since her lungs were so used to water. By the time they got to the shore, her lungs were burning for air and the brief peace she felt was gone.

The darkness, it helped her. It was someone; she remembers being tossed onto the shore, flipped on her back, and a shadow loomed over her. It's becoming more clearly when she remembers the fear she felt when she thought it was Hadrian ready to really finish her off. The shadow had put its hands together, one over the other, and slammed them into her chest.

Water gushed up her throat, through her nose and it burned and suffocated her mouth. The shadow reached out and turned her head to the side and she spewed into the sand.

That explains the puddle. Then the rest it pretty much a blank. Her body left her no choice and she slept. The fight and near death must've weakened her tremendously.

Now all she has to do is find a way out of here, and find the others.

If she can.

She turns around and sees the edge of the forest. She recognizes this shoreline. It was the same one where she followed Heather the first time she came to Berk. Astrid pushes herself to her feet, and her knees wobble under her. She's a little groggy from not walking and all the pain her body has taken from the battle. Then she's suddenly dropping to her knees and gasping for breath.

Stormfly.

She was bitten by the Cauldron. Not knowing how long ago that was, she could be dead by now. Astrid hugs her middle to dull the sudden sting that stabs her. She tries to fight back the sting in her eyes, but a stray tear makes its way down her cheek.

"I'm so sorry." She whispers through her sobs.

Suddenly a Nadder call echoes through the forest. Her head snaps up and she looks around. It happens again and she listens closer. It wasn't a real Nadder, but it was very authentic. Someone was calling her; but it was so distant she couldn't hear the tone in the call to recognize anyone. With nothing but the water at her back, she does the unthinkable and unexpected. She follows the call.

She gets to her feet and cautiously enters the woods. The call never stops, its quiet for a few seconds, then it calls again. It felt as if it was leading her somewhere. Whenever she thought she has found its origin, it would call from somewhere else. She doesn't see any phantom shadows or rustling in the bushes. This is probably a bad idea, but what other choice does she have. Her dragon's locked somewhere in the village dying, and her friends and chief are all allegedly dead. It is her only option.

She follows the mysterious call for a few minutes. It leads her to a battlefield, or at least a clearing that mimics a battlefield. Burn marks, scared trees, claw marks and deep ruts all over the place. She walks around to see multiple gigantic holes around the clearing. The Whispering Death and Stoick, Gobber. She can't tell who won, but it sure seemed to be some fight. She walks around until she comes to a hole bigger than seemingly bigger than the rest. Maybe it was the main one the dragon used for its attacks.

Astrid peers down, and suddenly she feels a pressure on her back, and the next thing she knows, she's falling and swirling around down the tunnel. The moonlight fades until she's completely swallowed by darkness. She can't scream, her throat's too dry, and she still hasn't found any water. All she can do is take the unexpected swirls

and turns until she crashes into a main tunnel. She does her best to roll on her feet, but she's still weak.

She pushes herself up and dusts off her skirt. She looks around and small streams of moonlight manage to provide a small but helpful amount of moonlight. It's not much but better than stumbling around in the dark.

Astrid wanders aimlessly, keeping her hand along the wall to ensure a definite side of this dark tunnel. She lets her hand trace over the dirt, ignoring any sudden roots, splinters of rocks and moist spots as she guides her way around. She comes to a corner and she pauses. Is she dreaming, hallucinating? There was a light. Nothing natural, it seemed manmade. A fire. It glows with red, orange and yellow. This could be a line to lead her in, but assuming all the Outcasts are back at Berk, she assumes whoever is responsible for the fire, she can take them.

She sneaks up, flattens her back against the dirt wall and listens. She can hear voices, they didn't seem threatening, but it wasn't until she heard Snotlout's annoying voice that her eyes widen and she turns the corner.

"Astrid!" Fishlegs cries with joy.

Huddling around the fire, was Fishlegs, Snotlout, Gobber and Stoick. The twins were left back on Berk, and Hiccup . . .

She banishes the thought the second it enters her thoughts. Gobber gets up and helps her over to the fire.

"Sweetie, you look tired. Why don't you take a seat." He gestures.

"Thank you." she says. Her voice sounded hollow, like it's been forever since she's used it.

"Thank Thor you're alive." Stoick says as he hands her a small basket of water.

It was held in a basket weaved from the roots. No doubt Gobber mad it, him being the natural survivor. She gulps down half of the basket before her voice feels better. Everyone has scars, cuts, gashes and many holes in their clothes. No doubt their battles were as merciless as hers.

"You're not the only one to be perused." Fishlegs says. "Hadrian attacked every one of us, and while we're all here, we barely escaped with our lives."

She only nods as he huddles her knees in her chest. She gazes into the fire, until the question she's been meaning to ask floats to the front of her mind.

"I heard a Deadly Nadder call. That's what led me to that clearing that's been scorched." She tells as she gazes around the fire. "Did any of you hear anything?"

"We thought it was you calling to Stoemfly." Gobber says.

"That's impossible, Stormfly's in the village . . . dying." Her voice catches on the last word, spreading concern around the fire. "She got bitten by the Cauldron, and I don't know how long I've been out, but after Hadrian's dragon dragged me down, I woke up on the shoreline."

"You're lucky to have made it there alive." Gobber says.

"I didn't." she says, and this snatches everyone's attention, especially Stoick's. "Someone pulled me to shore and revived me. But I passed out, and when I woke up, they were gone. No tracks, nothing."

This catches everyone by surprise, and he leans forward, intrigued by her experience. "Did you see who it was?" he asks.

"I couldn't make out any features. It was dark and it was a shadow." She explains, and Stoick's hope is stabbed right in the heart. "How did you all get here?"

"I came down here after Hadrian's Whispering Death 'finished' me. Then I found Gobber and sent him out to find anyone else, and he found Fishlegs and Snotlout." Stoick explains.

"Where were you two?" she directs to Fishlegs and Snotlout.

"We got slammed into the dirt thanks to Hadrian's dragon." Snotlout starts.

"Then Gobber found us buried in rock and rubble." Fishlegs finishes.

"Gobber?"

Gobber looks to her as he pokes at the fire with a stick. "After I fell off the cliff, I remember slamming into the water. That'll leave a mark later, but then as I thrashed, I was near drowning, when something picked me up and carried me, rather harshly to the shore."

"Was it that Boneknapper?" Fishlegs asks.

"Nope, this thing had skin and scales. Clear as day. For a moment, I thought I was dreaming." Gobber explains. "Then I was dropped on the shore and it was gone."

Fishlegs' goes rigid. He exchanges a look with Astrid and the two can guess what the other's thinking.

"Don't be ridiculous." Snotlout interrupts. "You're just hoping for the impossible."

"It doesn't hurt to hope." Astrid snaps.

"Try telling that to someone who actually cares." Snotlout counters. "Don't you get it?!"

Suddenly, Snotlout was furious and angry. He spring sup and begins to shout, his voice booming through the hollow tunnels.

"They rule the place now! Hadrian's the new chief, and he practically has the entire army of Outcasts on his side! He won! We lost! IT'S OVER!"

There's an uneasy silence before Astrid decides to speak. Her voice soft and shy, something completely out of her character. "I wish Hiccup was here."

At this, Snotlout's face instantly contorts from anger to sorrow. He clenches his fists and sits back down. Stoick doesn't say anything as he continuously stars into the fire.

"Well, he's not." He mumbles.

"You're not giving up are you?" Gobber asks. "We still have a chance."

"No we don't. Open your eyes Gobber. Hiccup's not here, we're down hiding in a tunnel and Hadrian's up there, ruling over my village."

"What about Spitelout?" Gobber asks, and Snotlout looks up."

"The man isn't fit to run the village, given the personality of his son. No offense."

"Some taken." Snotlout snaps.

"It really is over." Stoick says.

"No it's not."

The voice rings out so suddenly that everyone jumps.

"He's just one man. One criminal." It says, getting closer.

Footsteps could be heard and they were soft, but also accompanied by heavy thuds and the clinking of metal. Everyone turns, eyes widening.

"The men may be loyal, but it's out of fear. They're going to turn on him."

He comes out of the shadows, and everyone's eyes pop, and smiles spread across their faces. His body has changed. There's more muscle, he does have several cuts, earning his place among the rest, and there's something on his forehead that no one could see. Behind him, a pair of ice-green eyes open behind him. Then the head of a Night Fury pops out from behind him.

But it doesn't matter.

"Hiccup."

"Hey guys, miss me?" he says with a cheeky smile. He then tosses everyone clean and fresh clothes. "Now, put these on, we've got a village to save."

## 18. Chapter 17

Somehow, Toothless managed to sniff Hiccup out after he fell from the cliff. And it turned out he had washed up near Grandmamma's house. The two had apparently met up after Hadrian and Hiccup's previous battle. Toothless carried him to the cabin where they nursed and patched up his cuts and bruises. They also showed him some spells and incantations to practice for Hadrian when they were to meet again. It also explains the strange mark on Hiccup's forehead. It embodies courage, strength and perseverance. They need to lead Hadrian into the woods where they will have a trap set up all ready for him.

Now all they had to do was get Hadrian weak, and into the book.

Hadrian walks through the streets leading to the Square, watching as the men march and salutes him as he passes by. He gives them nods of salute and continues on. Cold white daylight spreads across the sky. Lurid, but still midmorning hazy, the light streams through gatherings of clouds bathing the whole village in a translucent glow, giving each building its own halo. But it does so little to cut through the fog the drifts through the streets of the village.

As he passes Hiccup's old home, he can hear a banging. He walks closer, two men guarding the door, and listens to the banging.

"You can't keep me in here! I know my rights!" Heather screams through the door.

"She's got quite the mouth." Hadrian says as he backs up.

"She's been going nonstop for an hour now." One guard informs.

"Hm, strong willed." Hadrian says stroking his chin.

"Anything we should do sir?" the other guard asks.

"We'll break her in due time. In the meantime, no food or water. Three days." He orders.

"Sir!" the men ten hut and Hadrian walks off.

He goes and visits the arena where the dragons continue to thrash inside their cages, all except for Stormfly. She lays, whining in pain as the bite mark from the Cauldron bulges and oozes puss.

"Soldier!" Hadrian calls.

"Yes sir!"

"How long has the Nadder been sitting there?" he asks.

"About seven hours sir, since last night." The soldier informs.

"She'll be dead soon. Leave her." He says leaving the arena.

He passes through the village until he finds Alvin and Mildew in front of the Great Hall. "Enjoying yourselves gentlemen?" Hadrian

asks as he approaches.

"Ten hut." Alvin says.

"At ease." Hadrian orders.

"I must say, this is quite the enjoyable sight. No teenagers, no dragons. This is just perfect." Mildew says as he gestures to the village. "You've done well, Hadrian."

Hadrian narrows his eyebrows and glares at him and Mildew backs away.

"Sir," he adds at the end.

Hadrian looks out to the Meridian of Misery. "So, what do you say, we move on to the Beserker Tribe?" Hadrian suggests.

But before anyone could answer, something snakes round Mildew and yanks him to the side into the fog.

"Hm?" Hadrian peers over.

Hadrian and Alvin look over and Alvin cautiously stalks over to Mildew's spot. They here rushing footsteps, and when the men ready, they see it's one of the guards.

"Sir!" the guard calls frantically waving his hands.

"Solider report! What's going on?" he asks.

"Someone attacked the Academy. There was a burst of light and suddenly, the fog drifted into the arena."

"Then why are you here?!" Hadrian asks, his face angry.

"We had to get out of there, sir! We were getting tormented and-"

"No!" Hadrian snaps, shutting the guard up right quick. "I will not tolerate failure! I will not permit you to run! You will stay. You will fight! And you will win!" Hadrian orders.

The guard sighs, stands straight and nods, "Yes sir."

He then turns and heads back to the arena.

"Alvin!" Hadrian commands.

"Yes sir?"

"Aid the men at the arena. I'll stay here."

"What about Mildew?" Alvin asks.

"His assistance is no longer needed." Hadrian orders, the walks off into the fog alone.

He walks through the village, unsure and not caring where he wanders. As he approaches a cul-de-sac of houses, he readies his sword. Then

two sudden explosives burst, giving off a blue-ish light, knocking Hadrian off his feet and onto the ground. Hadrian bounces and slides across the pavement on his side; the sword skittering out of his reach. He hisses as he pushes on his hands.

"What the . . ." he turns and faces the fog where he sees the silhouette of Stoick and the others. "No! I destroyed you all! You're all . . ." Hadrian's voice quietly diminishes as he stares.

Then a sudden burst of anger erupts inside and he sends four daggers zipping to the phantom shadows. But instead of embedding in flesh, they end up sticking to an old ken which now leaks water. Hadrian pushes to his feet and rotates as he tries to listen for the slightest sound that could indicate their whereabouts. Footsteps sound behind him, then in front of him. They were circling him.

Suddenly he's slammed in the back by a harsh fist. He bounces on his back and lands on his stomach. He automatically pushes to his feet, but he barely stood straight before a plasma blast hit him in the side. He lands on his back again, sliding to a stop. He pushes himself up to a sitting position, rubbing the left side of his head. He sees an oncoming shadow and swings his fist. He finds a direct hit, and it felt really real. He turns around and sees another. Leaping into the air, he readies a dagger, but gets slammed to the side by another heavy body. He spins and his hand first finds the ground, then sliding back on his toes.

He sees a shadow running through the fog, and then it leaps and whips a dagger at him. He blocks it with his own, and he hears it ricochet off and swallowed by the fog. He looks up, he gets knocked off his feet again from behind. His side hits the hard-packed earth before landing on his stomach. He grits his teeth, and pushes to his feet. He sees the outline of Stoick's shadow and chuck a knife for his head. He watches the shadow turn to the side, evading the dagger, and Hadrian runs toward a house, leaps left and right up the side to the roof. He runs across the banister, but feels a harsh pain on his side before he's knocked off and sent back into the fog. He manages to land with one knee up, and the other leg extended back. He hugs his side for a moment, and his hand comes back coated in blood. He's breathing heavy and beads of sweat dot across his forehead.

Hadrian looks up and can see the phantom shadow of Astrid. "Oh, it's just you Astrid." He snaps, his smile still playing across his mouth. "What's a matter? Aren't you even going to talk to me?"

"There's nothing left to say." A voice says and Hadrian turns to see Gobber's shadow now too. He continues to turn in a circle as he's surrounded by them.

"You had attempted to kill us." Fishlegs shadow says.

"Did you think we wouldn't take it personally?" Stoick says.

Then Hadrian turns to his front and sees the fog drift apart to reveal an outline he thought he'd never have to see again.

"It's over Hadrian." Hiccup says.

"Nothing's over as long as I'm still breathing!" Hadrian suddenly

shouts.

"Same goes for me." Hiccup counters.

Hadrian springs up and goes to punch Hiccup's shadow. Even if it was just an illusion - although now Hadrian was sure they were still alive - he'd finish him off himself. He punches left and right and watches as Hiccup avoids every single one. Then Hiccup's hand reaches out and snatches Hadrian's wrist, and flings him over his shoulder. Hadrian crashes into a wheelbarrow, the splintering wood stinging his back like a hive of angry bees.

He grasps the side behind him and pulls to his feet. He hears Astrid's battle cry as she rushes for him. Hadrian grabs a barrel from the cart and throws it at her. Astrid stops, and Stoick swoops her behind him with one arm before punching the barrel into pieces. Gobber then rips a tree from the ground and chuck's to Hadrian.

I have to get out of the fog, he thinks to himself.

He back flips back onto a pyramid of barrels behind him and hops until he reaches another roof of a house. A rope suddenly snakes around him and it tightens like a snake killing it's pray. With the splinters still in his back, it feels like barbed wire, and soon small red dots speckle on his back. Snotlout and Fishlegs yank the rope down and Hadrian slams into the hard mosaic of cobblestone at the epicenter of the Plaza. He gets to his knees and snarls at the two boys. Hadrian pats the dirt with his toes to feel for something and they find a sack of flour. He reaches down and spins, slinging the sack toward Stoick and Gobber. It bursts into an enormous cloud of white, and splattering all over the two.

Hadrian charges and pulls out his knife and manages to stab Stoick in the calf, but nothing to fatal which is what he wanted. And Gobber whacks his hammer into Hadrian's jaw line, making it a painful uppercut. Hadrian snatches his whip and wraps it around Gobber, and then looking to his right sees Snotlout. He smiles and pulls, swinging Gobber a couple times around before retracting the whip and letting Gobber crash into the boy. Astrid comes in and punches Hadrian left and right, missing each one, and when Hadrian goes for a jab, she ducks down, kicking his feet out from under him and leaping back. Stoick rushes in and readies to pound him into the ground, and while Hadrian leaps out of the way, Stoick delivers another punch right in his ribcage, and Hadrian's back finds the ground once again. He barely looks up when he sees the post from one of the feeding bowls crashing down on him.

Gobber and Stoick walk over to see if that did it, but they feel the ground shake and Hadrian bursts out of the ground standing on the head of the Whispering Death. Hadrian feels for his whip and realizes it's still in the fog. The Whispering Death hisses in hatred, but in unison, Hadrian's whip wraps around him, and Toothless tackles the Whispering Death sending both flinging in the air. It was only a quick jerk to get Hadrian off the dragon before the whip was retracted. But Hadrian's sent spinning for a few seconds before he sees the ground. But he didn't see, and what the Vikings didn't intend on was a large nail from the wheelbarrow standing perfectly straight on its head.

Hadrian crashes into the ground, the nail impaling itself straight

through his left side. He takes a sharp breath and lets out an unworldly scream. His back arcs in pain and he roll to his side, hissing and breathing heavy from the pain. Hiccup and Astrid approach him, but she nearly convulses at the sight of the nail. Hadrian shifts to his knees and grits his teeth.

"Oh, god dammit!" he snarls.

Gripping the nail with his right hand, placing two fingers from his left hand on his left side, he alternates between biting his lip and gripping his teeth. And he pulls at the nail. He aggravatingly groans and hisses in pain, and it takes a couple pulls, and then one hard yank before the nail comes out, sending a stream of blood arching through the air. Hadrian screams, and wobbly rolls over, his hand keeping him up and takes a deep breath, his vision blurry.

He hoists himself to his knees and puts pressure on his side, but the blood permeates his tunic and leaks onto his hands. He's breathing fairly heavy, and his forehead moist with sweat, beading together multiple thick strands of his hair. He looks around and doesn't see Hiccup and Astrid, and he starts to walk, but collapses. Pushing himself up, he starts to run as best as he can. But after a few seconds of wobbling, Hadrian's punched in the face by Stoick again, and sent flying back; he didn't even flip for a better landing he was weak. He kept his hand pressed to his side as he rose to his feet.

"What are going do now?" Gobber taunts.

Hadrian still manages to smile, and bringing his clean hand forward, he lets out a piercing high-pitched whistle. After a moment of silence, Gobber's suddenly thwacked in the back by the snout of a Changewing. Stoick charges for Hadrian, but the Cauldron's water sprays him back. Toothless had just bitten the Whispering Death before it wraps its tail around him and flings him off, then slithering over to join the other two dragons. Behind them, Hiccup can see Hadrian run off. He has to stop him before he gets stronger. But before Hiccup could think of how to get to him, someone yells his name and he sees the Changewing charge for him. Hiccup rolls out of the way and comes up on one knee. He reaches for his sword on his belt.

"Hiccup, go! We'll deal with these jokers!" Gobber orders.

"We aced their butts once, and we can do it again!" Snotlout yells.

"But-"

"Go Hiccup! We'll meet up with you!" Stoick says before punching the Cauldron.

Hiccup nods and gets up and rushes off to follow Hadrian.

Meanwhile, Hadrian made it back to the arena where he found several guards and Alvin. The floor of the arena is littered with bodies, and Alvin is trying pulling himself up from the floor. Once he gets to his feet, he sees Hadrian.

"Hadrian!" he calls, and two men still conscious come over and try to

help, but Hadrian pushes them off and orders them to get some gauze.

He makes his way over to an available barrel and sits, still hissing from the pain and trying to labor his breathing.

"I see you've met our new guests." Alvin rhetorically says.

"They attacked the arena?" Hadrian asks.

"They only gassed us before moving on. And it seems you're their primary target." Alvin says as a guard brings him gauze.

Hadrian unwraps it and lifts his blood soaked tunic up over his head to patch the wound. The men bring him a rag and he pats it down and wipes it clean before applying the wrap. He winds it around his body before giving it a tug to ensure it is tight, it pinches him with brief pain; but after, Hadrian takes a syringe and injects a clear liquid into his arm and the injury reduces to an annoying cramp-like pain.

"Where'd you learn to do that?" Alvin asks.

"Does it matter?" Hadrian snaps. "Now, to deal with Hiccup."

"What about Stoick and his men, sir?" Alvin asks.

"I don't care about them. I want Hiccup. Consider them at your disposal." Hadrian says before snatching his bow and walking off out of the arena.

"Oh, how I've wanted to hear that." Alvin says with a cruel smile.

Hadrian still hugs his side as the cramp feeling intensifies whenever he steps on his left foot. It felt like the pain was alive and breathing. It would be strong, then weaken, strong and then weaken; like it was breathing in and out. Hadrian coughs a couple times before he could stand up straight. The fog has slightly lifted, giving him a better look and idea of his surrounding instead of stumbling around. He manages to find another feeding post, and stops to rest. His hand on the post, he slowly breathes in and out, trying to build his tolerance to the pain.

"Wow, I have to say this is the weakest I've ever seen you." a voice rings out, and Hadrian's head snaps up. "And I like it."

Hiccup walks out of the fog, standing tall and proud as Hadrian straightens himself.

"Well aren't you a sight for sore eyes. I was hoping that courageous fall hadn't done you in. That was a pleasure I was hoping to have." Hadrian taunts.

Stoick punches the Changewing, sending it crashing into an abandoned house in the cul-de-sac. The other dragons were down and Stoick calls to everyone. "Kids, get to your dragons! We'll have a better shot at winning."

"What about Hiccup? Shouldn't we help him?" Astrid asks.

"Hadrian is Hiccup's fight." Gobber says. "We need to stay focused on breaking out the dragons from the arena."

The kids nod and before they leave, Gobber hands Fishlegs the antidote for Stormfly. Hopefully their not too late.

"I almost don't think it's fair to fight you. You're too weak to even stand." Hiccup snaps.

"I may be down, but I'm far form out." Hadrian counters. "Besides, it was only the nail, not you or your pathetic father and friends."

"Really? Because to me, it looked like they were kicking your butt." Hiccup provokes.

Hadrian only laughs. "Hiccup, you don't even realize how pathetic you are. You set your men to fight me, not you."

"What's the difference?" Hiccup asks.

"I went on my own to eliminate you and your friends and family. Even while you survived, you just sit back and let everyone take care of things for you. You never stand up for yourself. "

Hiccup clenches his fist.

Stoick and the kids were on their way to the arena while Gobber stopped at the blacksmith's shop to stock up on weapons. The arena was in their sights when a trio of soldiers blocked their path. The parted and let Alvin walk to the front.

"I'm surprised Alvin, I didn't think you're men took orders from you anymore." Stoick mocks.

"Hadrian's currently put them back under my control while he deals with your little runt." Alvin counters. "Are you on your way to see the dragons? I'm sorry Stoick, but no one's allowed inside."

"Well then we'll just have to make our way through." Stoick says and he was about to charge when a boulder came and knocked down all the guards at once.

Everyone looks to the side and sees Gobber with his catapult. "At a girl Martha!" he says while patting it. "Now let's get to the arena!"

"You sent them to do your dirty work, just as I did when I conquered your village. How can you possibly think that you defeated me when you didn't even lay a finger on me?"

"Fine then. Let's settle this." Hiccup challenges. "Just you and me."

"Finally."

Hiccup and Hadrian stand face to face. His drug has kicked in and now he stands like he usually does. Proud and ready, as if he already know how the battle is going to end. Toothless comes up behind Hiccup and hisses at Hadrian, but Hiccup gives him a pat on the head, and he backs up giving the two boys room.

Hadrian cracks his knuckles. "Let's finally end this."

"Ladies first." Hiccup mocks.

Both boys charge forward and Hiccup was the first to throw the punch. Hadrian ducks and windmill kicks Hiccup, flying him back and rolling across the dirt until he bumps into a wagon.

"I had expected better since you were gone, Hiccup. But I can see you wasted your time saving your pathetic little friends." Hadrian says.

Hiccup pushes to his feet and rushes Hadrian. He draws his sword and goes to slice at his head, but Hadrian blocks and the two push off. The moment they land, a blast of fire nearly scorches Hadrian. Both boys look up and see Stormfly, squawking and flapping good as new.

"What?" Hadrian questions.

"Hey Hiccup! Need a hand?" Astrid calls sounding genuinely delighted to have her dragon back.

Behind her, Stoick and everyone else including the twins have their dragons. But instead of happiness and confidence, Hiccup scowls. He looks over his shoulder and sees Gobber running with Heather who looks clearly dehydrated. He looks to Toothless, and he nods. He lets out a roar, and the dragons all flap higher into the air before gliding back and landing.

"Stormfly!" Astrid says. "Come on!"

"This isn't your fight!" Hiccup calls. "Stay out of it!"

"But son!" Stoick calls, but before he could finish, Hiccup rushes Hadrian and the two crash together with the metallic clang of their swords.

Hadrian head-buts Hiccup and he slams into the wall of a house. Hadrian chuck's a dagger at him and Hiccup weaves out of the way, and looks behind him to see Hadrian attempt a sneak attack.

"Hiccup!" Stoick calls but Fishlegs stops him.

"It's like you said sir. Hadrian is Hiccup's fight. It's not ours. We can only hope for the best."

"Besides," Gobber adds. "Your boy can handle himself. After all, he's your son." Both men manage to smile before another crash calls their attention.

Hadrian shoots two arrows at Hiccup before attempting to whack at him with his bow. Hiccup dodges left then right and when Hadrian goes to kick his feet out, Hiccup flips over him to land behind him. Before

he even could raise his sword, Hadrian spins and slashes Hiccup. Luckily only the ends of his hair. Hiccup leaps back to get some distance and runs around, circling Hadrian, chucking two daggers to his head. Hadrian blocks with his sword, but mixed in with the daggers was a small smoke bomb. The minute it meet impact with his sword a cloud of dust belches out. It only last a second, but when it clears, Hadrian sees Hiccup rush in and punch him hard enough to crash through the wooden wall of a three story abandoned food storage.

The place was already slated for demolition. Holes in the ceiling, the walls were weak; not even the floor was stable enough to withstand weight no bigger than a hundred pounds.

Hadrian rides his momentum and flips back landing on his feet. Hiccup rushes in, chucking two daggers aiming for his feet. The two run through the warehouse, Hiccup the one throwing daggers now and after the first two, Hadrian semi-turns and after blocking another one, chucks an explosive he stole from Gobber. It explodes and blasts Hiccup through the wall leading to another room stored with old tables and chairs; creating a good size hole in the wall. Hiccup bounces, but adjusts his form and slides on his feet before leaping and chucking two more daggers at Hadrian the minute he sees him in the hole. Then sending two giant handfuls of explosives at the hole, but Hiccup is mortified to find Hadrian still standing, his arms crossed over his face in an X.

The hole now big enough to let in a Monstrous Nightmare. Outside, everyone stays and watches as the battle continues.

He uncrosses his arms and cracks his neck. "It may be a challenge fighting against your family and friends, but against you. Ha, I'm invincible."

He then leaps high and crosses his arms again, and when he uncross, six explosives go off and Hiccup is blown back, slamming into a group of old wooden cabinets on the wall, and crashing into a table set for six. Hadrian grabs another wooden table and throws it at Hiccup. Hiccup leaps right, then left to avoid a chair, but as he jumps to strike Hadrian, he suddenly swings out his bow. It slams into Hiccup, breaking form the harsh impact and Hiccup is sent darting back, plowing through stacked chairs and tables. The splinters were now everywhere, and Hiccup was starting to think he was made of wood. Cuts and bruises started festering on his arms, and blood drips from the corner of his mouth. He pushes to his hands and knees, head lower so his hair covers his face.

Outside, Goathi and Grandmamma rush over to the group.

"Grandmamma!" Heather exclaims.

"Oh, it's good to see you child." Hugging Heather. "But Stoick, where are the boys?" She asks.

"Hiccup's working on it." He says and points to Hiccup and Hadrian.

Hadrian is slowly walking up to Hiccup, who's still trying to push himself up on his splinter-filled arms. He draws a sharp breath.

"Did you really think you could beat me?" Hadrian mocks.

Hiccup snarls.

"Face it, Hiccup. No matter what you do, you'll always be a little runt."

Hiccup grits his teeth so hard they might crack. He fists his hands embedding more splinters and partial glass from abandoned vials left in the cabinets. He flicks his eyes to his right and sees an abandoned arrow buried under the wood.

When he speaks, his tone is dark and his eyes have deepened to a loathing gleam. "Then let me show you just what a little runt, can do!"

In an instant, he spins and snatches the arrow, stabbing it in and through Hadrian's thigh. Hadrian screams in pain and Hiccup uppercuts him hard, arching him back and sliding across the wooden floor, leaving a small dent in the floor. Hadrian looks up and sees Hiccup crashing down on him, legs straight and slamming into his chest. The impact sends the boys crashing through the floor and into the basement of the warehouse. The two keep spinning in midair trying to get the other to crash into the ground first, a shower of splinters following them downward.

Hiccup pulls his dagger out from his belt as they crash to the floor, pinning Hadrian under him. Hadrian grips Hiccup's wrists, preventing him from impaling the dagger to his face. Then Hadrian head-butts Hiccup and kicks him back with his legs. Hiccup flips back, but tosses two daggers at him. Hadrian fakes left then right and running up the staircase leading back up to the first floor. Above, both boys can hear the encouraging cheers of Stoick and the teens.

Hadrian pries the arrow loose. Hiccup draws his sword and tries to pin down Hadrian by his clothes. The two spar, and break apart. Hiccup leaps on the railing and rolls forward, forcefully slamming his feet together at Hadrian's chest. Hadrian bumps into the wall, but then kicks up dirt and dust on the stairs. Hiccup squeezes his eyes shut and coughs to prevent the substance from invading his lungs. The minute he opens them, Hadrian tackles him and both boys flop off the stairwell and onto the floor; Hadrian pinning Hiccup this time. He grips Hiccup's wrist tightly while pinning down his shoulder with the other. Hadrian twists Hiccup's wrist, and hears the crack causing Hiccup to cry out in pain.

"You've definitely changed Hiccup. I'll give you that!" he shouts over Hiccup's cries.

Then he suddenly grabs both of Hiccup's wrists and swings Hiccup to the side into the wall, and then the other side; creating two huge craters before dragging the limp boy up the stairs and spinning and tossing him high in the air. Hadrian snatches his whip and wraps it around Hiccup and yanking down so he crashes into the wood, then he swings Hiccup across and out of the warehouse crashing through the wall again. Hiccup's back takes the first of the impact as he skips across the dirt, then he stop on his knees, mimicking a bowing position. He spits out a mouthful of spit and blood.

"That's right Hiccup! Bow before your superior!" Hadrian mocks as he approaches the boy. Both were breathing heavy, it was only a matter of time.

Hiccup flips his hair out of his face and glares at Hadrian. "You may rule over Berk, but you don't rule over me! And you're going back where you belong!"

"Never!" Hadrian shouts as he charges for Hiccup.

Hiccup jumps and his feet land on Hadrian's back, and he pushes off, leaping a good distance and forcing Hadrian to stumble to the ground. Hiccup rolls and come up on one knee. Hadrian immediately pushes up and glares. Hiccup readies his sword and stares him down. Hadrian charges and Hiccup waits until he's in range, then he quickly grabs the whip he hid in his belt and lashes it out at Hadrian. It wraps around his torso, binding his arms to his sides and Hiccup pulls and swings him into a pyramid of barrels, then he cracks the whip up so Hadrian is lifted, then yanks and as Hadrian closes in, he punches him.

Hadrian skips back and ends up on his stomach. He struggles to get to his feet, but when he does, Hiccup tackles him to the wall and continually punches him left and right, not even giving him time to react. Finally, Hiccup plow his fist into Hadrian's diaphragm and Hadrian let out a mixture of a scream and a hollow breath. Hiccup leaps back and watches as Hadrian hugs his middle to dull the pain, and he readies himself for what's to come next, but he doesn't need to. Hadrian gives him one last glare before he drops to his knees and collapses on the floor.

"Goathi now!" Hiccup orders, and the old woman rushes to Hadrian, tracing a circle of salt around him. Also, Snotlout and Gobber rush in and tie his wrists and ankles together.

Hadrian snickers. "What are you going to do? Cast a spell on me? It's a waste of your time."

"You would think she taught me spells, but I actually learned a curse." Hiccup says as Grandmamma hands him the royal blue book with gold trim.

As Hiccup spoke, his eyes suddenly glow that now familiar ice blue light, his hair starts to levitate and sway, and the book suddenly gets an eerie white luminescent glow.

"No!" Hadrian screams and he tries to wiggle out of the bindings.

The book's light became brighter, as if it was illuminating from the inside.

Hiccup starts to chant. "Alderon Enlenthronow, Vosoenliris nor!"

Hiccup's voice echoes and brings the book forward as it shoots out a thick and bright beam of light and it hits Hadrian direct hit. Hadrian screams as he continues to thrash. Then it's as if the book became alive, it lifted from Hiccup's hands and landed on the ground. Its covers flapping like a bird for a brief second before it started

sliding to Hadrian, who's now standing and trying to free himself.

And he does.

He rips apart the rope cuffs and escapes the circle. But he doesn't go for Hiccup or anyone; he's not just trying to get away from the book as it hunts him down. It didn't matter if he was out of the circle; the book's light is like a magnet or tracker for him. It will find him.

And it does.

As soon as it got close enough, it shot out another white beam that seemed to stick to Hadrian. It gobble his legs and festers up his legs as it drags him into the book. Everyone rushes to watch and Hiccup was going in to close the book once it's finished, but as Hadrian's torso was getting sucked in, suddenly Hadrian swings around and grabs Hiccup's ankle.

Hiccup gasps and claws the dirt as Hadrian pulls. "I'm not going back alone!" He screams.

The beam makes Hadrian's hair blow straight up and the glow of the light makes him look more menacing than ever.

"Let go of me!" Hiccup screams as he tries to kick him off.

Then after Hadrian's head sinks into the book, Hiccup is suddenly levitated into the air and sucked in as well like a demon into hell.

"HICCUP!" Astrid screams in horror.

The book was about to close then Grandmamma steps forward. "Ecranom, hezberack mortix!"

Then two white translucent balls close around her hands; looking like mist trapped and swirling around inside; and they shoot a beam at the book, and the book's covers flatten to the dirt. Her eyes glow the whiteness of the book.

She grunts as she pushes back the force of the book. "I can only hold the book open for a certain amount of time. If Hiccup's going to do something, he better do it quick!" she shouts.

"We have to help him!" Astrid cries as she moves forward.

"No!" Grandmamma shouts, stopping her. "It's Hiccup's problem, let him deal with it! Besides, if he loses you'll all be stuck in there forever!"

"He won't lose." Astrid says, her hands held tight together. "He won't."

They watch as the book's cylinder shaped portal flashes and mimics the sound of thunder. It shoots all the way up until it practically rips through the sky, clouds bordering and floating around it.

Inside, Hiccup struggles to break from Hadrian's grip. He manages to kick him in the face and slam the heel of his foot onto Hadrian's knuckles. The two break apart and they float midair as the portal leads them inside the book.

"You just made the biggest mistake of your life!" Hadrian shouts.

"I thought that was letting you out!" Hiccup counters.

Then suddenly, Hadrian's eyes glow that familiar deadly crimson red. He fists his hands and red energy bolts flicker before materializing. He brings his hands together and they combine to make a larger bolt and it strikes Hiccup. Hiccup clenches his hand and waves it in front of his face, creating a shield to Hadrian's power. There was a huge crash, like the sound of an avalanche of rocks crashed, then both the shield and beam faded away.

"Out there I may just be a normal person, but here, I'm more powerful than ever!" Hadrian says.

He then zooms for Hiccup and comes to a halting stop inches from him. Hiccup looks up eyes wide, then Hadrian smiles and bends his fingers to mimic claws, and another red bolt flickers. He then slams it into Hiccup and Hiccup is sent flipping back in the midair.

"I rule this world here Hiccup!"

Hiccup manages to stop flipping and rises up, eyes an icy blue. "Not anymore!"

Hadrian snarls and claws his fingers both hands create a large semicircle, where thousands of other bolts shower down from it and pelt for Hiccup. Hiccup fists his hands and flies around each bolt, dodging every single one, and getting closer to Hadrian. Hadrian then starts shooting them off one by one, hand by hand. Hiccup smoothly flies out of the way and squints his eyes.

He claws his own hand and a blue bolt flickers. It felt weird, it was like, pure energy in his hand. He never noticed it before, but it felt great. The power it wielded.

Hiccup remembered Grandmamma telling him about the energy bolts drain you because they're stealing the power from your body. You had to be wise at how you use them. So when he told her how easily Hadrian used them, she warned to be careful. If he just shot them off randomly " like Hadrian's doing " he'd be out of breath in minutes. She told him to think of them as arrows for a bow. Use them wisely and at the right time, otherwise, you lose all your ammo, and your left defenseless at the hands of the enemy.

Hiccup remembers this as he nears Hadrian. He claws his fingers, and could feel the energy flowing into the bolt. He then whips out his arm, hand and fingers straight " just as Grandmamma taught him " and the bolt takes a clear shot to Hadrian's hand. As he was readying to shoot another bolt, it crashed into his hand and counters it. Hadrian looks and sees Hiccup floating in front of him, bolts ready on each hand.

Hadrian laughs, but it was cut short when he suddenly becomes aware. Hiccup looks behind him and they both can see a distant wasteland of

grey. Cool air prickles the tiny hairs on Hiccup's arms. There were tombstones, dead trees and black birds. Ash rains down around them, heavy and thick enough to collect on the shoulders of the trees. Phantom figures and looming shadows darted back and forth, and gathered, as if they were expecting the boys. Like a flock of ravenous vultures, they encircled the opening of the portal.

Hiccup suddenly felt something belt around his waist and looks to see Hadrian had placed an energy belt around him. The physical confinement frightened Hiccup and he tries to wiggle free. Pain invites itself into his brain like a bad memory.

"They want a new friend to play with, so they'll get it!" he shouts as he pushes Hiccup further down.

The figures bark with raucous laughter. Panic pools into his stomach as he tries to free himself. The way Hadrian said the word friend made Hiccup's skin crawl with goose skin. "No!"

He twists at the waist, sending a fierce kick to Hadrian's side. To Hiccup's surprise, his aim lands true, and under the snug fabric of his tunic, Hiccup felt part of his torso cave in with an audible crunch. Hadrian roars at him, though more out of fury, it seems, than pain. The other phantoms, their laughter transforming into sympathetic hisses, writhed and withered away from the opening, cringing and clutching into themselves like snakes.

Wind pulls and jerks at his clothes, like it's dragging him down. Hiccup struggles against Hadrian and the pull of the wind as they near the opening. Hiccup looks up and sees the other end of the portal fighting against something to keep it open.

"You're going to pay for trapping me! I'll see to it you never see the light!" Hadrian shouts.

Suddenly a burst of adrenaline courses through his veins. His eyes snap open. "See to this!"

And instantly, Hiccup's eyes shoot out beams that match the blue of his energy bolts. They his Hadrian squarely in the face and Hiccup's free from the belt. He then flies upward and throws three energy bolts at him until he's above Hadrian. Smoke clouds and once it clears Hadrian looks down, then up; just in time to get hit by Hiccup's eyes beams once again. He flips backwards and down until he's near the opening. The shadow figures growing happy and their disturbing psychotic laughter echoes in the funnel.

"No!" he screams.

"It's over Hadrian!" Hiccup shouts before he gives him one final hit of his eye beams, then he falls through and Hiccup immediately turns away when he hears Hadrian crash, then fight off the phantoms.

Someone screams. Was it him? Shrieking like the voice of an owl. Hiccup looks around and sees white heat engulfing the tunnel, engulfing him. He was grateful not to feel the pain. A gift perhaps from the marking on his forehead from Goathi.

Hiccup zooms up the funnel as fast as he could. He can see it just

about close to closing and he tries to fly faster. Beneath him, Hadrian zaps the shadows and they scurry away like cockroaches. He flies back up the funnel, in high pursue of Hiccup.

Back in the real world, Astrid and Stoick were the closest they could be to the book without disrupting the energy field. The white luminescent cylinder flickers and flashes. Astrid looks down and sees a silhouette of someone. She can't tell who it is, but her mind immediately traces to Hadrian from the outline. Her heart sinks.

Hiccup looks down to see the fire course the length of his arms. It dances over his legs and Hiccup watches as the edges of his tunic curl and turn from green to orange to brown to black. Hiccup sneers as he near closer and finally clenches his fists and shoots all he has left behind him, rocketing him quicker to the opening.

He sees the silhouette of someone.

Astrid looks down and sees the figure come closer.

Hiccup sees the person is Astrid.

Astrid sees it's Hiccup.

The fire collapses, tumbling into ash around Hiccup. And then it snuffs into blackness as he plows and breaks through the energy field. It causes a huge explosion of combined power, sounding like a whole armada of cannons opened fire in unison, knocking back Grandmamma. Hiccup flies a few feet high before reality takes over and he's sent spiraling down. But he couldn't stop himself. The minute he re-entered the real world, the end result of his final power overdrive left him too weak to even attempt. The blue glow in his eyes faded away and the mark withered like a rooting flower and floated off like ash.

He started rapidly descending.

"Stormfly!" Astrid calls and the Deadly Nadder swoops up and catches Hiccup in time, and setting him down between Stoick and Astrid.

The book levitates a few feet and everyone watches as the cylinder end becomes rigid and bouncy like waves of the ocean. It glows bright and projects quickly down into the book. The book itself encased in a floating ball of energy, looking like lightning is trapped inside.

Once the beam sinks into the pages, the field of energy around it disappears. The book automatically closes with the sound of a wild and powerful thunderclap and it tentatively floats back down and onto the ground.

Astrid cradles Hiccup in her arms and gently pats his head to try and wake him; afraid that a harsh slap - like she normally would do - will somehow injury him more. His body felt neither cold nor warm next to hers, solid, but somehow not alive. She listens, but he never breathes. Her gaze trailed up to his chin and nose where she can make out faint burns and cuts, faded, but scared on him so that may never forget.

Stars dot the sky around them, visible through the tangles of knotted limbs with their peaceful leaf-dotted boughs. The light before the sun rises bleeds across the sky.

Hiccup's mind is blank, and yet he can feel his thoughts wander and roam. He feels the soft and calm flow of energy in his blank slate. He's in a violet tinted world. He has smelt this smell before. It was that too sweet, deep scent of decay. Dead roses. It wasn't a bad smell, but it was too strong in such a concentrated dose. The stale, moldering odor that hung in the air didn't bother him as he thought it would. He almost felt comfortable. Safe.

He felt the press of something like fabric against his cheek. His hair tickles his brow in the wake of a breeze, and through his eyelids, he sensed light. By now, Hiccup has surfaced to consciousness enough that it was too late to fall back into the deathlike chasm of rest. To settle back into the cocoon sleep, that blank place between dreams and reality, where the word "nothing" found its true definition.

Against his will, he became more aware of himself, of the seemingly limitless aches in his body, and finally of that steady one-two rhythm of his heart. His thoughts broke through the muck of oblivion, and he stirs. He begins to feel the gentle patting on his cheek, and voices murmur above him. His eyes flutter open. Images and silhouettes floated around him, blurred in tints of fuzzy white and muted gray, as though his eyes had gone permanently unfocused.

\_Hiccup.\_

Hiccup.

"Hiccup. Hiccup?" Astrid says.

Astrid!

Hiccup's eyes widen, letting in the sunlight of dawn, but still it blinded him. He closes his eyes against the light. He blinks again, staring up into the huddle of people around him, the shapes of his friends and father becoming clearer and sharper. He felt his body hitch as he draws in an involuntary gasp of air. He didn't even realize he stopped breathing.

"Hiccup?" he hears Astrid repeat for the fifth time.

He looks up and sees her face, pale with worry and her sparkly blue eyes glisten against the light, giving them a faint halo around her iris.

"Astrid." He says. His voice was rusty and dry, but somehow she had heard him.

Her eyes immediately fill with tears that stream down her face. He laughs and giggles, something she never does. His father leans over and smiles. He felt his father's meaty hand cup the back of his head and stroke his hair.

Hiccup doesn't know what or why he does what he does next, but he doesn't care. He reaches up and caresses Astrid's face. His palm flat

against her cheek, she giggles even more. She presses into his palm, feeling the streams of the tears smear on his skin. She holds his other hand with hers, and she strokes the skin of his knuckles with her thumb.

"I'm home?" he groggily asks, and the two laugh in unison.

"You're home."

## 20. Chapter 19

Hiccup places the book inside the interestingly designed trunk in Grandmamma's basement. He places it in the center of the trunk and closes the lid with a soft click, locking the hatch. The trunk was an old white color with gray metal corners traced into exquisite floral curves, the outer rim traced in silver and located at the very back of Grandmamma's basement. Kneeling, he gazes blankly at the trunk; expecting Hadrian to come out again and try to strangle his throat.

He pushes himself up and takes the vial with a rounded bottom filled with salt and traces it around the trunk before sprinkling it across the top in a thin coat. Then stepping away from the trunk, he places the vial onto a nearby nightstand and takes a deep breath.

Grandmamma said that the salt was supposed to cleanse the air and space of evil spirits, and also trap them within that limited space so they're not allowed anywhere else. Hiccup was doubtful, but after quickly going over the previous battle in his head, he now knows not to question that within the realms of magic.

Hiccup walks back up the stairs and looks back. The darkness an inky black blanket covering the stairs. Hiccup sighs, and turns up the final step, closing the door behind him. He makes his way through the house, glowing a warm buttery glow due to the multiple candles stands located in various parts of the room. Looking around, Hiccup reminisces on the feeling of power and strength he had during his final battle. A part of him almost going to miss that feeling; those energy bolts, the eye blasts gave him a feeling of, freedom and courage he rarely ever felt.

But for now, being free of Hadrian, was all he needed, and all he wanted.

He steps out through the threshold of the old cabin and sees Toothless and the others waiting outside. Toothless' head was the first to pop up and notice him, the others followed. He walks up and greets Hiccup as he comes to the end of the stairs leading out of the cabin. He walks over and dips his head under Hiccup's hand; in which Hiccup instinctively scratches. He smiles down at his Night Fury as he hears him purring.

"Hiccup," he hears Astrid say. He looks up to see her nervously fiddling with her hands. "Are you okay?"

Hiccup looks around at the many eyes peering at him, waiting on his very voice to shatter their silence and tension. Hiccup turns back to the cabin, and takes a deep breath, sighing; a cloud of air puffing

out.

He looks back to Astrid. "Yeah. I'm fine."

Astrid smiles and wraps him in a hug. When she releases him he looks to her.

"Let's go home." He says smiling.

The ride back to Berk seemed relatively calm. But Hiccup's mind was anything but relaxed. Just something about this whole thing doesn't seem real. Hadrian's really gone. He'll no longer invade hiccup's dreams, won't be plotting with the Outcasts to take over Berk. He had grown so accustomed to seeing Hadrian everywhere, it's hard to believe he's suddenly gone. But the sense of what the future will be like without him only excites Hiccup more.

And yet, for some reason, Hiccup wishes he could've done more to try and help Hadrian. Maybe he could've helped him turn good, but then again, he did say himself he was beyond help. But what he really wanted was to be real, to be acknowledged. Hiccup couldn't imagine what it must be like to walk around the world where no one ever sees you. Hiccup looks to the sky and takes a deep breath.

This is what Hadrian wanted.

To smell the scent of real ocean. To feel the sun on his skin. The wind in his hair. Beneath the excitement and relief, a small kernel of pity takes root and burrows. Hadrian wanted freedom, and Hiccup only trapped him for eternity in a book where darkness itself dwells. Forever imprisoned, smelling ash instead of air. Walking around a dead valley in a sea of grey instead of lush green fields.

A breeze kicks up and Hiccup feels a small line of his cheek feel cold. Wiping his eyes, Hiccup realizes he had been crying.

Amazing.

After everything Hadrian's done to Hiccup and his family, to the people of Berk, he still feels sorry for him, and actually wants to help him be better. Hiccup shakes his head and sniffs. Gripping Toothless' saddle, he whispers to himself.

"Goodbye Hadrian."

Then as if Toothless had been feeling Hiccup's connection, with one powerful flap of his wings, Toothless zooms forward, and Hiccup loses himself in the cocoon of clouds.

The villagers had line up on either side of the streets leading to the Great Hall as Hiccup and the other Vikings fly overhead. Days after Hadrian had been recaptured, villagers slowly started returning to Berk. Within a week's notice, more than half of the village's population had come back. Others wish to stay away, looking for change of scenery, or they wish to move on. But some have bluntly said they don't want to live on Berk mainly because they blame Hiccup for bringing disaster to the village. Outcasts, tired of Hadrian, and Alvin's strict rule have moved to the village as well, and after seeing what they had gone through with Hadrian, Hiccup had welcomed

them with open arms.

Cheers erupt and people scream and shout to Hiccup as he lands at the base of the steps to the Great Hall. Pats on the back were given and kisses from girls were brushed on his cheek. Hiccup made his way with Stoick up to the Great Hall where it had been decorated specially for Hiccup. Banners streamed across the walls, lanterns from Snoggletog loop around the columns and an enormous tapestry with the Berk crest dangles over the fire pit.

Hiccup greets and says hello to the villagers and many of the already drunks in the room. He takes his plate of food and makes his way over to his spot at the head of the table with his father. Everyone else settles into their seats and Astrid and the other Vikings take their seats around the pit. Stoick raises a mug in the air and the Hall falls silent.

"I'd like to make an announcement." Stoick begins. "I know we have seen so much happen in these difficult times. But through it all, our bond of strength, power and loyalty, has carried us through them, and brought us back together. But most importantly, it brought back my son, Hiccup." Stoick looks down to Hiccup and the hall cheers and roars. "Hiccup, through these challenging times, I've watched you suffer. And I've watched you grow. You overcame a great obstacle, and I have never been more proud of you in my life. I know I've never taken the time to really appreciate you, or say it, but I do, and I love you. And I know your mother is greatly proud of you as well."

Hiccup's eyes water and he gets up to hug Stoick. Everyone cheers and applauds them both and Stoick takes Hiccup's hand, and raises it to the crowd.

"Now let's eat!" Gobber cheers and the Vikings roar in agreement.

As the Vikings gather their plates, Hiccup sits down and feels a hand on his shoulder. He looks up to see Stoick. "Thanks dad. That really means a lot."

"Of course son. I'm proud of you. And I know, you will make an even greater chief, than I ever will." Stoick says.

Hiccup smiles and tears fall down his cheeks. He wipes his eyes and smiles. Toothless comes up and coos to him in happiness. Hiccup laugh as Toothless' forked tongue tickles at his cheek. As he tries to push the Night Fury off, he hears the door to the hall open. He looks and sees Heather poke her head in. Hiccup smiles and gets up from his seat.

Heather nervously looks around, rubbing her arm as Hiccup approaches her. She smiles at the ground and steps forward. "Hey. She says timidly.

"Welcome to the party." Hiccup says and the two laugh in unison. "Hey listen, Heather,"

She looks up, her green eyes sparkling.

"Come here." Hiccup says extending his hand. "I want to talk to you."

Heather blushes as she takes Hiccup's hand. He leads her out of the Hall and through the village until they reach a hill bordered by a wooden fence, separating them from the edge of a Cliffside. There, they stare out at the vast ocean as it washes and waves in and out of the Meridian of Misery. Hiccup and Heather lean on the fence as seagulls caw and dive for fish on the surface.

"Heather, I'm going to ask you straight." Hiccup states, then they turn to each other. "Do you like me?"

Heather blushes; eyes wide at his bluntness. She swallows, and smiles. "Yes. I do."

"Since the beginning?" Hiccup asks as he turns back to the gorgeous view.

"No, it was just something small. But watching you, getting to know you. Things changed." She admits. "I know it's probably shallow and wrong of me to like you because you're a hero now and all. But, trust me when I say it's more than that." She says.

"It wouldn't be the first time being a hero helped me get the girl." Hiccup says as he chuckles softly.

"I know you probably think little of me since I like you now . . ." Heather starts.

"No, I don't." Hiccup interjects. "Astrid was the same."

Heather turns to him in surprise. "Really?"

"Yeah, we weren't the closest in the beginning. I liked her like crazy, but to her at the time I was a simply screw-up who could never live up to his father. But soon after a few weeks of good in the arena, and thanks to her curiosity and a dragon ride, she eased up."

"That's different Hiccup." Heather states.

"I fail to see the difference."

"You weren't really a hero yet, and after you showed her the other side of things, she . . ."

"She eased up. She did kiss me, but things haven't been moving along." Hiccup admits.

"Because you're both too coy to admit it?" Heather teases, bumping Hiccup's elbow.

"The point is," Hiccup says as he chuckles. "Both of you girls didn't start to like me until you got to know me. Whatever you think is wrong on why you like me, or if you think it's not right, it is." Hiccup admits.

"I'm not following." Heather says.

"I know you both like me, and I know it's because I'm a hero and because I've proven whatever theories you had of me wrong. And

there's nothing wrong with that." Hiccup says.

"Heather smiles and looks out to the view. "Look, I don't want to come in the middle of you and Astrid, and I certainly don't want to make you choose."

"You're not. And frankly, I don't know who to choose, and I don't want to make you girls wait." Hiccup says.

"So, you're not going to pick, yet?" Heather asks.

"Not yet." Hiccup says.

"Things are still blowing over, and I'm still trying to get used to things."

"Of course." Heather says. "So, what are you going to do now?"

Hiccup stares out at the ocean before answering. "I don't know." He takes a deep breath. "I mean, I've gotten so used to seeing him everywhere, and now that he's gone, I almost have nothing to do. I'm almost expecting him to do something else; like to come back and try to kill me. But for the first time, and forever, he never will again."

"Don't worry," Heather says placing a hand on his shoulder. "I'm sure adventure will find you again. It always does."

"Honestly, in the beginning, I never thought I would be you, Heather. I never thought you'd notice me as something more than a pleasant Viking." Hiccup admits.

"Neither did I, but what was before I realized how passionate, strong and courageous you can be. As well as a hero." She jokes.

Both decide it's best to head back to the Hall before people notice Hiccup's disappearance. As they talk, the sun soon vanishes and three early night stars appear in the sky. They had just entered the hall and a small section of the floor has been cleared for dancers. They both hear Gobber's panpipes play from the open doors of the Hall. The band soon chimes in with soft strings and guitar chords. A soft melody trails out and fills the air with a comfort and peace.

Hiccup turns to Heather and holds out his hand. "Dance with me?"

Heather smiles and nods, taking Hiccup's hand. Leading her into the crowd of couples and several people, they begin to slow dance, rocking back and forth to the sway of the music. Heather soon rests her head on Hiccup's shoulder and Hiccup rests his cheek against her head. Astrid was finishing her mug when she looks over and sees the two dancing together. A feeling of barbed wire coils around her heart and yanks, sending a searing pain through her chest. She watches as the two dance, simply rocking back and forth in a circle. They don't seem to be staring at each other in that romantic way Astrid always hears, but still, seeing Hiccup dance with her makes Astrid crazy in ways she can't quite fully explain.

Heather rests one hand on Hiccup shoulder while the other stays

wrapped around his back. Hiccup holds heather's hand, stroking the skin with his thumb, the other on her lower back.

"You know what I've been thinking?" Heather mumbles.

"What?"

"How is it that my grandmother, of all people was chosen to help you in your adventure?" she asks.

"I don't understand." Hiccup admits as she raises her head.

"If I never decided to come here, you never would've met her, or even know about her." She states. "And maybe this would've all turned out different."

"So, you think it was something of fate? Destiny?" Hiccup teases.

Heather laughs. "I'm trying to be serious. I came here for a reason. It might be calm now, but I don't know, maybe I was destined to help you or something." She smiles.

"That is possible. And who knows, maybe there's a place for you in my future." Hiccup says smiling.

"We'll see." She breathes as she rests her head on his chest.

They stay like this for the rest of the song. Far off in Goathi's cottage, she and Grandmamma are restless.

"I'm telling you honey, that boy is something special. There's more to him than the skill to train dragons." Grandmamma says as she flips through one of her books.

Goathi draws in the dirt and Grandmamma reads it.

"Yes, there might be something bigger for him out there. I've haven't seen that kind of energy power in ages. And as you can see that's saying something."

Goathi writes again.

"I'm not sure if it's just when he's dreaming, but with his power, and if it's real, we're in bigger trouble than before."

Goathi writes, asking what she could possibly be talking about.

"Hiccup's powers, they're more than just something of a dream. He's something very special, and very rare. He has greater power than any of us, even the Outcasts could've imagined."

Goathi looks to her in confusion, yet fascination.

Grandmamma turns away and looks down into her book. After flipping through more pages, she suddenly gasps, and Goathi rushes over.

"Oh my. It is true." She breathes. "This is incredible, and terrifying."

Goathi places a hand on her shoulder to inform Grandmamma to tell her.

"Not yet sweetie. We must keep this to ourselves for the time being. Let everyone have their celebration." She closes the book after marking the page with a ribbon. She walks over to the window and looks to the full moon.

"I'll tell you this Goathi, that boy is something special. I just hope no one else will find out. It'll be devastating."

\* \* \*

><p>Within the depths of a secret underground grotto, water drips from the stalagmites. A soft blue glow emanates from natural crystals. A light mist dwindle through the cave as moonlight pierces the darkness with iridescent darts. A small underground pond is placed in the epicenter of the small room of the grotto. Ripples dance across the surface as a dainty fingers pokes at the water. Grandmamma's face ruffles away and as her finger swirls in the water, the water mimics her movements until Hiccup's face materializes.</p>

He's holding a mug, raising a toast to the villagers.

The soft yet sultry giggle of a woman echoes off the walls. Layers of glowing white draped and clung to the curvatures of her slight though tall frame, and it was as though the fabric itself was made from moonlight. A gauzy veil of white covered her head, like a cerement of the grave. She was beautiful. Luminescent, like a sliver cut from a dying star. Trails of gently curling hair, thick and raven black, tumbled past the length of her fingertips, a stark contrast to the white. Behind the veil, two large onyx eyes stared fixedly at the water.

"It is true." She speaks. Her voice was deep and throaty yet wholly feminine. "The man I've long been searching for really does exist."

She raises her hand away from the water and takes a step backward, the train of her veil whispering against the floor. She pivoted where she stood as Hiccup's image faded away from the small pond and reappeared on the walls of the cave where water streams down from the surface.

"Finally, after all this time, we can finally be together." She whispers.

The black pools of her eyes stared deep into Hiccup. As if exploring his soul.

"And I will finally have my happy ending."

~ To Be Continued ~ . . .

End  
file.